



主不従僕で契約奴隸求めて

イラスト
なめこ印
よう太



ファンタジア文庫



俺と彼女が下僕で奴隸で主従契約
oreto kanojoga gebokude doreide shujuukeiyaku



「そんなこと俺に聞くなあ！」

ハヤテ・ミツルギ

シェリーに召喚された契約獣?
名前以外の記憶を失っている

シェリー・シャルラッハロート

ハヤテを召喚した魔女騎士。貴族で
ありながらメイド喫茶のアルバイト
などをしている

「白と黒どつちが好き?」

「やっぱり別の下着にしようかしら?
パンツはシンプルなのと柄物どちらがいいと思う?」



キルル・デーメテール

ディアスペル王立学院のクラスメイト。家訓を守るために、ハヤテに結婚を迫る

アリア・ヴァイスハイト

サーヴァント
キルルの幼馴染み。契約獣を偏愛しており、ハヤテに興味津々

結婚

ハツ…ハヤテさん!

してください!

「ぜひとも君と裸のおつき合いがしたい」

ビクトリア・ヴェルデ

ディアスペル王立学院のクラスメイト。シェリーとハヤテに対し、強い対抗心を燃やしている

「わたくしが妊娠したらどうするつもりですか!?」





体のあちこちを彩る色とりどりのリボン。
フリルつきの純白のカチューシャ。
普段クールな彼女を幼く見せるようなツインテール。
ところどころ丈が際どい、けれどかわいらしく纏められたエプロンドレス。
そう、今のシェリーの格好は完膚なきまでにメイドだった。

Ore to Kanojo ga Geboku de Dorei de Shuujuu Keiyaku Volume 1

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Prologue: Awakening and Meeting

He suddenly woke up.

Hayate jumped to his feet the moment he regained his consciousness.

He seemed to be inside a room. It was a quite spacious one-room apartment of sorts. There were furnishings and carpets spread out as far as the eye could see. It appeared that a considerably prosperous individual was residing in this room.

Wait, what am I doing here?

When and especially how he had come to this room – he didn't know.

Due to this baffling situation, Hayate was thrown into confusion.

“Who are you?”

Someone was talking to him from somewhere.

He turned around.

And then he suddenly gasped.

Behind him was... a girl. A girl so beautiful that he seemed to be unable to even voice his wonder.

She was enveloped by her light-rose-colored hair that seemed to almost cradle her upper body.

Her seemingly milk-white thighs peeked through from between her rather short skirt and knee socks.

On top of that, her looks were crisp and shapely.

Despite being slender, as if a sculptor had carved out the ideal figure, her body proportions were very balanced. The light-blue scarf around her neck was buried beneath those twin mountains on her chest.

But what attracted his eyes the most among all those things was her gaze.

If one was to describe the feel, then hers was like an arrow.

Staring straight at Hayate with those ruby eyes of hers, they were virtually piercing through him.

“...”

He was forgetting to breath out of fascination and then she suddenly started to approach him. He backed away in confusion, but didn't pay attention to his surroundings, and consequently drove himself into a corner.

She suddenly started to touch all around his body.

Wh-What?!

Surprised by the sudden skinship, Hayate froze up.

After a while of being in such a situation and at her mercy, she started to smell his skin.

As her head drew closer, his temperature rose more and more.



“Hm... The appearance seems to be right, but the smell and softness of that body appear to be close to a human’s.”

The young girl briefly pondered about something and then continued:

“Perhaps I should check the taste as well, just to be sure?”

She said and stuck out her small tongue.

“C-Cut it out!”

Hayate instinctively stopped her and pushed her away.

“Oh my, so it seems you’re able to speak after all? You should’ve answered me from the start, then.”

“Eh... Ah, well.”

“Do you have a name?”

“Hayate... Mitsurugi.”

“I see. So you seem to have a name. Where have you been born?”

“That’s...”

Hayate tried to answer her question, but...

“...Huh?”

He didn’t know it. Well, more like he realized he wasn’t able to recall it.

Holding his forehead, he frantically tried to remember, but his memories drew a blank.

And then he remembered the question from when he had first woken up moments ago

“How did I... get here?”

“A little while ago you came out of that.”

She said and pointed at the floor.

He lowered his gaze following her pointing finger and glimpsed at an incomprehensible, mysterious pattern drawn in a circle. Lined up around the circle were six lit candles.

“That’s...?”

“That’s the ritual needed to summon the contract beast of a hexenritter.”

“A hexenritter’s... contract beast?”

And what did she mean by summon? Did I come out of that pattern?

“W-Well then, where is this place I’m at right now?”

“This is the Starfarm Kingdom’s High-Class Hexenritter Training Institute. The student dorms of the Diaspell Royal Academy. Incidentally, this is the room of mine, Sherry Scharlachrot.”

Grasping the opportunity, the young lady revealed her name.

And then Sherry slightly tilted her head to the side.

“It’s about time that I heard your answer to my previous question. Have you remembered your birthplace?”

“...I can’t remember.”

“Not even a little?”

“No... I can’t remember anything but my name.”

In order to express the anxiety that was swirling around in his mind, Hayate spoke honestly. If he hadn’t told anyone, he might’ve gone insane.

Amnesia – that’s probably how people would call it.

And then he started to silently read the titles of the books that were lined up on what appeared to be Sherry’s desk.

...He had no trouble reading them. It seemed like he could understand both, the letters *and* words on them.

If he hadn’t been able to, he would’ve been a bit concerned.

“That’s right! What about my family?!?”

As that suddenly came into his mind, Hayate desperately tried to search through his head again.

But, as expected, he couldn’t remember anything at all about himself.

There was no mistaking that his parents ‘existed’, he had confidence in that... However, neither their faces, nor names, or even whether he lived together with them – he couldn’t recall a single thing.

He didn't understand what's going on, he just wanted to see his family for now. Hayate couldn't remember where his hometown was although he really wanted to, so there was no way for him to return.

He seemed about ready to burst into tears.

At the same time, Sherry stood in front of him, grumbling and pondering about something.

“He has a name at least, but he doesn't know his own roots... Well, not all contract beasts know where they've come from, so the possibility of him not remembering anything certainly exists... That's right, I'm sure the summoning process didn't have any flaws, so there's no reason for it to have failed...”

...At any rate.

Admittedly, no matter how many times he looked at her, she was an outrageously beautiful girl.

It seemed to be close to dawn outside. Though, ‘waking up’ didn't appear to be the appropriate description right now.

He was charmed by her nonetheless... Or was it *because* of the situation, that he fixated his eyes on her to escape reality?

At this moment, Sherry, who had been looking down, raised her head.

“I-It's not like that!”

“No matter whether it's like that or not, I've decided.”

Saying that, Sherry came to touch his body again.

“I knew it, it seems to not be much different from a human body out of flesh, right?”

“That’s— I mean, I *am* human...!”

“But you got no memories, do you?”

Being told his weakness, Hayate remained speechless.

“If that’s the case, there’s also the possibility that you’re a contract beast which just very much resembles a human being. So let’s test something first...”

“T-Test? What do you...”

“Whether or not you’re my contract beast.”

Sherry replied with a cold voice.

She raised her right arm in an arrogant manner and stuck out her index finger.

Her arm and fingertip were extended beautifully, just like a blade.

“In the name of Sherry Scharlachrot, I command Hayate Mitsurugi——”

“...?!”

He didn’t know why, but he reflexively put himself on guard.

And then, while this beautiful fingertip was pointed at him, Sherry directly swung down her arm and shouted in a resolute manner:

“——Sit!”

One, two seconds went by.

She had said something, but... only awkward silence followed.

Wha... What's wrong? Why this weird, disappointed atmosphere?!

“...That's strange, isn't it...”

Her eyebrows raised in surprise, Sherry's face seemed puzzled.

“A contract beast is a manservant, to whom his master's commands are absolute. If you're my contract beast, you should obey by my name.”

In other words, this whole thing just now was to verify whether Hayate was her contract beast or not.

Was the motive behind her command to be as little harmful as possible or to make him kneel down? Depending on which, his impression of her would change greatly, but...

“A-Although I don't understand it very well... I haven't obeyed you, so I'm not your contract beast, animal, or whatever, right?”

“I wouldn’t say that yet. The summoning circle I used was a bit ‘special’, so... it could be different from usual. Isn’t a summoned contract beast that doesn’t succumb to a hexenritter’s enslavement power mysterious too?”

To make it short, he still understood nothing.

Hayate sighed.

“Well, let’s make sure little by little. At any rate, since you don’t have any memories, I can’t find out who you really are, so... That’s right, isn’t it...”

Sherry raised her head.

“You really must be a human-type contract beast, and if you by any chance were *my* contract beast and fought for me...”

She then cut her words for a moment, put her arm on Hayate’s neck and brought her mouth so close to his ear that he could feel her breath. Like that, she continued her unexpected speech in a whisper:

“...As compensation for this contract, how would you like it if I became your slave?”

Chapter 1: An Academy Life Filled with Women

Sherry provided Hayate with a simple explanation of the Diaspell Royal Academy.

First of all, this academy had been established to train hexenritter.

There were only a few countries on the Frühling continent, most of them were operating National Hexenritter Training Academies.

Those so-called ‘princess knights’, the aforementioned hexenritter, certainly were mankind’s greatest force. Only they were able to stand up against the demonic beasts that were running rampant across the continent.

The power which the hexenritter provided had become indispensable to guard people, country, and virtually everything.

And so, many countries invested in the cultivation of hexenritter.

The Diaspell Royal Academy itself was administered by the Starfarm country. Its personnel, equipment, and location counted as the continent’s most famous.

That kind of high-end academy, of course, was attended by high-end students——girls of nobility that held a high aptitude as hexenritter.

“I get it... Well, the gist of it at least. What I don’t quite get is what those ‘nobels’ are.”

“Not knowing about nobels... What period are you from?”

She said with her typical direct approach. Still, she was completely shocked.

The nobility system had been rooted into society for a long time already. Times in which people hadn’t been distinguished by either being a noble or a commoner were hundreds of years in the past, it seemed.

Well, nobles, commoners, or whatever, either’s fine...

I’ve got a bigger problem than that... With the exception of Hayate there was not a single man to be seen in this academy.

“Haa...”

Hayate heaved a big sigh.

The sigh carried various meanings... ‘I want to get my memories back as fast as I can...’, or ‘I want to see my parents (though I can’t remember their faces)...’, or ‘I want to see my friends (that I probably had (?))...’ Really, a lot of meanings.

And on top of that... he had been put into *this* kind of situation right now.

“So basically... it’s like that? Sherry Scharlachrot...”

An anger-concealing voice resounded inside the room.

He was in a room with the plate ‘Chairman Office’ on its door. Standing next to Sherry, he was in an alerted stance. A woman past her middle age had called out Sherry’s name and she was—— Diaspell Royal Academy’s Chairman, Shanse Snipenir – owner of this room.

Having put her elbow on top of the office desk, she hid her mouth behind her clasped hands – they were shaking slightly.

“You didn’t use the summoning circles prepared by the teachers, without permission you drew your own in your room, conducted the ceremony, and summoned that boy over there by mistake?”

The chairman said and glared at Hayate.

Why does she have to glare at me...

In his opinion, *he* was the victim here.

Anyway, because of the summoning ceremony that Sherry had performed, he had suddenly been summoned under her as her contract beast, causing the memory loss.

Sherry said that Hayate was probably a human-type contract beast. Hayate himself, of course, had insisted with a loud voice that, ‘I *am* a human!’, but when she asked him, ‘Couldn’t it be that you’re just under the impression of being a human?’, he didn’t have any evidence to just brush it off. He lacked the memories, after all.

Was Hayate just an ordinary human who had been summoned by accident? Or was he a human-type contract beast? Both of those possibilities had been thoroughly discussed between them, but they had yet to come to a conclusion.

Be that as it may, even if a conclusion was still lacking, one thing had remained.

Namely, the pressing question of how to deal with Hayate.

Sherry had suggested, ‘Let’s ask the academy’s chairman for her judgement first’—— And thus, the two of them had visited the chairman office the next morning and now they were receiving a rebuke in there.

“I don’t make mistakes most of the time, chairman.”

Sherry nodded to the words of the chief with a voice as cold as ever.

When she was showing a grand attitude like that, Hayate felt like misapprehending it as ‘Are you an idiot or what?’ while dwarfing next to her.

“I must apologize regarding that summon ritual I performed, however...”

“...What is it?”

The chairman briefly said, the intimidating sense of her voice increased.

Contrary to earlier, her angry gauge was clearly filling up... Sherry and the chairman seemed to have some kind of history together, but Hayate himself was very tense while listening to the conversation from the sideline.

Sherry kept talking in a composed manner nonetheless.

“I think you as the chairman might have heard about it already, but I’ve failed several contract beast summonings while generic summoning circles of this academy were being used.”

“...”

“As far as I know, ‘if a Hexenritter doesn’t have a contract beast, they may not perform duties of hexenritter’.”

If a hexenritter doesn’t have a contract beast... ?

What does that mean?

He couldn’t afford to interrupt the conversation of those two at this point, even if it was just to ask a quick question.

It was a crucial moment which determined how they’d deal with him from now on.

He gulped down the questions that were boiling up inside him and decided to wait for another opportunity.

“I understand that you’re worrying about the summoning blunders. Certainly, if a hexenritter hasn’t got a contract beast, they must not pursue the duties of hexenritter... Still...”

The chairman heaved a long sigh and rubbed her temples as if to hold back her distress.

“...That’s the result? Primarily, the summoning ceremony’s sacred. Using a summoning circle of your own just like that and furthermore, out of all things, you summon a man. Were you perhaps accused to be a disgrace to all hexenritter? Even at the best of times, you’re...”

“I’ve gotten used to all the slander going on behind my back.”

That moment, the young girl said with a stubborn resolution whilst facing the elderly woman, who was sending her an anxious glance:

“——For the sake of my dream, I *will* become the strongest hexenritter by all means necessary. To not be able to summon a contract beast – not passing even that requirement – that wouldn’t even be funny.”

“I understand your pain...”

However, the chairman continued:

“Already one month has passed since you’ve enrolled in this academy. I’m trying to protect you in my own way after you’ve acted on your own this time, but... if you’re still unable to get a contract beast now, then sooner or later the higher-ups will order me to kick you out of this academy. If you don’t want to bear an unheard-of shame like that, or possibly before that...”

“Thank you very much for your concern, Chairman Shanse. However, if you would refrain from using ‘still’, that’d be wonderful. You see——”

Suddenly, *pull*, Hayate was being pulled on his right arm.

His elbow touched her breasts.

“O-Oi!”

“——It’s not yet decided that I’ve failed that contract beast summoning.”

The academy chairman raised her eyebrows at Sherry’s rebuttal.

“What do you mean?”

“That here’s proof.”

She picked up Hayate’s right hand and presented it to the chairman.

Just then, the eyes of the elderly woman opened wide.

“That’s... a contract mark?!”

“Eh?”

Tempted by the her voice, Hayate looked at his right hand too—— and then raised his voice in similar astonishment:

“Wh-What is this?!”

A blood-red crest had emerged on Hayate’s right hand.

It appeared that it represented a sword.

He hadn’t noticed it at all... Or more like, he seemed to not have noticed it with all the other abnormal circumstances around him.

“That’s a contract mark. It’s proof that we have a contract as hexenritter and contract beast.”

Sherry briefly whispered that the sword crest—— the contract mark was a proof.

He didn’t care whether it was a mark, a decoration, or whatever. What Hayate knew was that it was just too real that unusual phenomena were happening to his own ordinary body.

Neglecting the shaking Hayate, Sherry faced the chairman once more:

“There certainly is no precedent of a human-type contract beast being summoned. However, as a contract mark has emerged, he *is* my contract beast. Won’t you please let me observe this situation for a bit longer?”

“Oi, wait a sec. I’m humaaahaaa—!”

Towards the willfully continuing Sherry, Hayate attempted to object and was consequently pinched on his behind. Of course the chairman wasn’t able to see it from her angle.

After hearing Sherry’s request, the chairman was seemingly troubled and kept silent for a short while... but soon she nodded with a sigh:

“...Let’s see. I cannot bear the thought of having to have you, the granddaughter of Gloria-sama, drop out of school either. Well then, for the time being... temporarily, I’ll allow it, but... please treat that boy as your contract beast then.”

“Thank you very much, Chairman Shanse.”

Sherry elegantly bowed in thanks.

While she was at it, she forced Hayate to bow his head too.

“C’mon, you too!”

“Ouch, ouch, ouch!”

You’re ripping my hair out!

Seeing that sort of two-man skit, the chairman was still giving off an anxious look.

“Did you really understand? Treating him as your contract beast means that you as the summoner will bear the responsibilities of looking after and controlling him.”

“I’m aware of that, of course.”

She answered without a moment’s hesitation.

Shortly after that, both of them had received permission to take their leave.

“...Hey, looking after and controlling me, what does that mean?”

On the way to the dorm, Hayate asked about the last words the chairman had said.

“That’s simple.”

In front of him, Sherry stopped and turned around.

“From today on, you and I will be living together in my room.”

“Eh... EEEEEHHHHHHHHH?!”

It took him a few seconds to understand the significance of those words.

What the heck is happening to my body?

Since last night—— or more precisely since dawn, *that* had been the only question on Hayate’s mind. He wanted an answer, it was a serious problem, after all.

For now, Hayate took it out on her while they were heading back to the dorm.

“I’ve had enough already! No more! How the hell did this even happen?!”

“You’re in high spirits, huh?”

“I’M IN LOW SPIRITS, ALRIGHT?!”

“Well, since you’ll be breathing the air of a room filled with my fragrance, it can’t be helped, I guess.”

“You think your body odor gets me going?!”

“Please don’t call it body odor. That’s unpleasant.”

“Then you stop spouting things as if I was some kind of hentai who gets off of a girl’s scent!”

“...Eh?”

“Don’t tilt your head! Or rather, I don’t care about your scent! Why do I have to live together with you?!”

By catching up to her pace, he forcefully put the totally derailed conversation back on track.

“...*sigh*, yare, yare.”

“See, why wouldn’t I be shocked by that?”

Be it memory loss or contract beasts... strange things like this and that kept happening to him, but living with a girl all of a sudden? How did that happen?

Sherry remained silent for a moment and watched the ranting Hayate, but suddenly she approached a chest of drawers as if remembering something and—— started to undress.

“Wh-Wh-Wh-Wh—?!”

In front of the dumbfounded Hayate, she dropped her skirt.

When she put her slender, long fingers on the strings of her panties, he panicked and turned his back to her.

“Why are you suddenly stripping?! And even starting from the bottom!”

“I want to change into a fresh uniform before we go to the dining hall. I was up all night yesterday and broke a sweat there. If there was more time, I’d also take a morning bath...”

“B-But I’m saying doing that in front of me...”

“It can’t be helped, right? This place is one-roomed and if you waited in the corridor alone in this girls-only dorm, I can’t even imagine what kind of uproar you’d cause.”

Certainly, he had been by Sherry’s side all the time during the walk to the chairman office earlier. Besides, because of Hayate’s presence, they had been flooded with impolite questions and subjected to inquisitive gazes. Perhaps he had been misunderstood as some kind of insolent intruder who trespassed upon the sanctum of women?

Still, if he went outside alone... he surely couldn’t tell what would happen.

Even though he had wanted to say something, Hayate swallowed deeply because of the sound of rustling clothes coming from behind while he thought various things.

“Well then, let’s get to your question of why you’ll be living together with me from now on. It’s just as you heard from the chairman’s explanation earlier. Hexenritter have the responsibility to look after and control their contract beasts.”

“And that’s... I’ve been wanting to ask you this since yesterday already, but please teach me about this hexenritter and contract beast thing.”

“You really don’t know anything at all, do you? Or should I rather ask whether you just can’t remember anything?”

“...Beats me.”

He knew the words and letters—— or rather remembered them—— but when it came to hexenritter, contract beasts, and these kinds of things, then he couldn't remember. If she was asked, then it seemed to be the most ordinary thing in this world.

Was he just unable to recall those things? Or did he never know them to begin with? For Hayate, someone without any memories, this was something impossible to judge.

“It could probably also be amnesia, but... whatever. I’ll give you a crash course while I’m changing, so be grateful.”

“Right, right, thank you very much.”

“I can’t feel any sincerity here. Why don’t you at least kneel down on the ground?”

“Why does every last person have to kneel down to you?!”

“If that’s too much, how about you show your gratitude and face this way?”

“Aah, enough!”

Such a troublesome woman!

Thinking that, he reluctantly turned his head—— As she was still in her underwear, he got flustered again and shut his eyes.

“Why are you *still* changing?!”

“I wonder, did I say I was done?”

“B-But that’s—!”

Sherry had told him to look her way. Hayate had assumed that since she had told him to, she'd already be done changing – no one could blame him.

They were black...

It's not my fault that I saw the very adult-like design and that a whiff of her butt was shining through... Even if it there's a continuous loop of that in my head, it's not my fault at all. Right, absolutely not!

“Well, the dining hall’s closed at this hour anyway, so I’ll give you some brief instruction... I wonder if I should go with different underwear after all. Which do you like better, plain or patterned?”

“I don’t wanna hear that—!”

“White or black, which do you prefer?”

“As if I’d know!”

“You won’t look and on top of that I can’t even ask you what color you like?”

“How are you answering my question with that?!”

Satisfied with ridiculing Hayate, Sherry finally started to talk about hexenritter and contract beasts.

“We already talked a bit before we went to the chairman office, but the ones called ‘hexenritter’ are the only existences in this world whose power can compare to those of demonic beasts.”

“If I remember correctly, demonic beasts are man-eating monsters that frequently appear on the Frühling continent, right?”

“That’s correct. Nobody knows where they’ve been born or came from. But demonic beasts do appear on the continent. The strength necessary to protect people’s daily lives—— that are the hexenritter.”

“Hmph. But why girls?”

“Because only girls can become hexenritter.”

“Why? Men aren’t allowed to?”

“You’re saying strange things again. How could men become hexenritter, they can’t even become witches.”

“What are witches?”

“Women who’ve studied the art of magic. You asked before I got to explain it, but magic is the art of using energy, the magical power that exists within one’s body, needed to perform various phenomena. Furthermore, only girls hold this power.”

“Men don’t have magical power so they can’t use magic?”

“Basically, as long as it’s a girl, they’re holding magical power, so if they study magic, any of them can become a witch. From there on, those that have an even higher aptitude—— In other words, witches that carry a sufficient amount of magical power, are able to bind a contract with a contract beast. A witch with said contract is called a hexenritter.”

“Hee——”

“To add onto things, the witches who’re endowed with enough magical power to form a contract are restricted to those born of nobility. That’s due to the fact that those who had strong magical power were married into the same families for generations.”

To become a hexenritter, one had to form a contract with a contract beast.

And to be able to form said contract, one had to be a daughter of nobility that already carried lots of magical power.

“Only noble daughters are skilled as hexenritter and with the exception of hexenritter, there’s no one who can protect people and country from demonic beasts... I see, is that why it’s so important to be a noble?”

“That isn’t always the case but that seems to be the official stance on it.”

It had been a bit of a long talk, but now he understood the main points of this country’s concepts and hexenritter.

“So then, what is the purpose of this essential contract beasts?”

“Manservants.”

...A single word.

“Can you please elaborate a bit more?”

“I guess it can’t be helped... Which reminds me, do you like them black or white now?”

“Are you still pulling off that joke?! Or wait, you still haven’t decided on your underwear?!”

“Yeah, soon I’ll grow cold down there.”

“Then put on some clothes already!”

“Don’t wanna. There’s no way I can compromise on something like this. A girl’s beauty is decided upon her ideals.”

“Aren’t you just deciding about what to wear under your skirt here?!”

And why did what she said almost sound cool there?

“That’s right, yep. Let’s go with white then.”

In the end, it seemed like she took the black ones from earlier off and then dressed herself again.

The sound of smooth cloth sliding over skin could be heard.

...Don’t picture it, me! Nothing must cross my mind...!

“So... I wonder, what did you say again?”

“Please tell me what contract beasts are. In detail.”

“Oh, that’s true, isn’t it? I think I just told you about the amount of magical power, but the truth is even if one has a lot of magical power inside their bodies, humans can’t use the biggest part effectively.”

“Eh? Why?”

“It’s due to output ability... Alright, would it be easier to understand if I compared the relationship between magical power and output to that between a reservoir and a flood gate?”

So the magical power within one’s body would be like the reservoir’s water and the human’s output ability would be the flood gate.

Assuming the amount of water the reservoir collected was 100 units, if the size of the flood gate would only allow five to pass through, then only those five could flow down the waterway at a time.

“The size of a human’s flood gate averages from five to eight, sine even have ten. But it’s not possible to use magic that could bring a demonic beast to its knees with this kind of output. Even if one’s magical power was 1000 or 10000, that alone doesn’t hold any meaning.”

The explanation was easy to understand.

“Whether you’re a noble or a commoner, regardless of which, the size of the flood gate stays limited. Hence, the contract beast’s are important.”

pam, she closed the drawer.

To make sure, he secretly took a glimpse over his shoulder and was relieved that Sherry was wearing the crisp uniform of Diaspell Royal Academy that lived up to its reputation, and so he finally turned around.

“Contract beasts are a special kind of beast that lives by using the magical power of young ladies as their nourishment.”

“I don’t intend to live off of something like magical power...”

“It’s not as if the ordinary contract beast just stabs their hexenritter with a straw and suck it out of them or anything. The hexenritter and contract beasts are bound together by an invisible thread, and magical power is transferred through that.”

And then Sherry suddenly compared her body with his...

“...When I think about it, I wonder whether you and I are one right now...”

“Stop inviting misunderstandings.”

“Pervert.”

“I’m not!”

“You’re looking at young and tempting body and don’t have any desires?”

Young and tempting... I certainly did have a look at her butt. It was so firm that... stop that!

“Listen up, please continue the story. Contract Beasts feed on the magical power within hexenritter and in exchange for that they fight demonic beasts?”

“You’re dodging the question, aren’t you? Well, it’s fine. I’ve got a generous heart so I. Will. Forgive. You.”

Even if he was told that in a sexy voice, he wasn’t happy at all.

“I’ll return to the story, but a contract beast’s duty isn’t to kill the demonic beasts. It’s not like they’d never fight, but their main role is to assist the hexenritter until the last. They’re supporting them with their superior physical and special abilities. Furthermore, they’re absolutely obedient. Exactly like a manservant.”

“...Even if you say that, something like that is impossible for me, okay?”

I’m neither a contract beast nor a manservant. I’m just a human.

I don’t have the power to fight monsters or demonic beasts.

However, Sherry had said ‘assist’ just now.

In other words, the lead who’d fight until the end would be the hexenritter.

“Huh? Even if hexenritter... Even if they’re holding powerful magical power, can’t they only use weak magic? If a contract beast is just support, how could they even fight?”

“That’s related to the ‘certain ability’ a contract beast holds. They give form to the magical power, which they receive from hexenritter, within their bodies and——”

When Sherry tried to talk about that ‘certain ability’——gigantic chimes resounded within the academy and made her fall silent.

“...The dining hall will close up if we don’t hurry. We’ll talk later.”

“Oi, oi, you’ve gotten to that point, postponing it now would be a bit...”

“You’re saying you want me to miss out on breakfast?”

Being told that in an almost pouting voice, he could only remain silent.

Well, I’ll have as many chances as I want to ask her about it.

Besides, it’s her problem too that there’s no proof of me being her contract beast and that I also don’t know a thing about what to do.

So because of the memory loss, I have to handle being a manservant and also gotta survive somehow?

He had to regain his memories fast and prove that he was just an ordinary human. If only his memories would return, he’d be able to remember his hometown and with that could go back home.

At that moment his eyes met the contract mark that had suddenly emerged on his right hand—— the sword crest.

“...”

Sherry had told the chairman that this was a contract mark, but... was she surely not mistaken?

“What are you doing? Hurry up and come, please.”

“Eh?”

Hayate had already been completely settled with seeing her off and was surprised that she told him to follow.

“Don’t you want to act as my contract beast? If you do, you’ll have to do as many things with your master as possible.”

“That’s, but...”

“Shut up already. At any rate, it’s not like you have anywhere to go, so just be obedient and listen to what I’m saying.”

She takes advantage of people’s weaknesses without mercy.

I don’t really want to enter this all-girls academy...

Hayate was flustered and before long Sherry heaved a sigh.

“...Well, if it’s just something like food, I’d be fine with bringing it to my room, but the amount I could take out would be limited, you know? Besides, every room in the dorm gets cleaned by a maid on a daily basis.”

He had a hard time imagining how it would feel to be watched as the only man in an all-girls dorm.

There were plenty of reasons to raise the white flag.

“...I’ll come with you.”

The desks inside Diaspell Royal Academy were set up like a staircase, and the desk from which the teacher taught was the lowest.

Behind said desk was a blackboard so large, no adult seemed to be able to reach its top. How could they write on it then, you might ask. With magic, of course.

Well, putting the classroom’s structure and height of the blackboard aside...

The problem had started after they finished their meal in the dining hall and Hayate had entered the Rivaldi classroom that Sherry belonged to.

The noble girls were refined and high class ojousamas just as he had heard of. Their chatter before classes started was just as elegant. Without loud voices, they put their hands up to their mouths and laughed sophisticatedly.

Then it got terribly noisy the second Hayate followed Sherry through the classroom door.

“Oh my, a boy!”

“Eh? That’s a man? Don’t they grow beards like my father does...?”

“Why is there a male here?”

“He’s together with Scharlachrot-san, but I wonder what relationship they might have?”

“Relationship?”

“Isn’t he a servant?”

“He doesn’t seem to have an educated face... but I think I like this wild type as well.”

“Oh my! How improper that is!”

“Could he perhaps be Scharlachrot-san’s lover...?”

“””KYA—!”””

“And yet I haven’t even held hands with a gentleman.”

“Me neither.”

Shriek after shriek.

They had also drawn a fair amount of attention when they went into the dining hall, but that was when it was almost closing, so there hadn’t been a significant number of people in there and they only bore with a few whispers. However, in this classroom were 20 people—— all girls of course. The gazes and pressure in the dining hall was nothing compared to this, it was so much that it almost made him turn and run.

Still, he somehow mustered some willpower and put strength in his steps. Together with Sherry, he went to the bottom-most desk and sat himself beside her at the window seat.

“Is it really okay for a contract beast to be seated here?”

“So you want to be alone in this completely foreign world?”

Her reply came fast and he broke into a cold sweat.

...This is harder than I had imagined.

The thing that exceeded his imagination was the attention they were drawing.

When he thought about how everyone in the classroom was staring at him, he couldn't help but to be overly self-conscious of himself.

The girls' guessing of his true identity and their gazes piercing his back, they carried various thoughts from favorable comments, simple questions, up to subtle hate.

The pressure sitting on him was horrible and he unconsciously turned his gaze downwards... Then he came back to himself as a deep-black dog began sniffing his leg.

“Hey, who's this fellow?”

“It's called 'Black Beast'. If you touch it tactlessly, you'll get shocked, you know?”

“OWA—!”

He unintentionally drew back his leg. At that moment, small sparks scattered from the black dog's fur.

A Black Beast was a contract beast from whose body lightning sprang forth.

“...”

Hayate got nervous, but before long the Black Beast left, seemingly having lost interest in him.

“Was that one of the so-called usual contract beasts?”

“Well, kind of.”

Sherry nodded.

“...So, to you... that and I are the same?”

As a matter of course, he didn’t have anything one could call naturally given abilities.

And when he looked around in the classroom again, he saw swarms of the most outrageous animals, like serpents with wings and lizards bursting into flames.

“You were summoned under me, right?”

“It was an accident, wasn’t it?”

“The contract mark also came forth.”

“That’s why I’m telling you that this must also be some kind of mistake.”

“To make sure of that we have to observe the situation, right?”

Sherry really wanted to treat Hayate as a contract beast... Speaking of that, the chairman had also mentioned that she’d have to drop out of the academy if she didn’t get one.

Wouldn’t it be troubling for her if I wasn’t her contract beast...?

“Haa...”

“Could you please not look at my face and sigh? It’s unpleasant.”

And whose fault is that? He thought.

When Hayate was going to sigh once more, the classroom door opened and the teacher entered.

“Who’s that?”

“That’s the homeroom teacher. Her name’s Lela Schwartz-sensei.”

“Hee—”

Lela stood on the podium. She was a beautiful person covered in black clothes.

“Originally, she belonged to the country’s chivalric order and was lured to the academy when they were looking for and bought skillful people. She’s in charge of the subjects ‘Magic’ and ‘Practical Battle’. She’s rumored to do many secret things in private, but it’s a riddle among riddles. A fan of hers stalked her up to her home once, but... she never spoke again after that.”

“I don’t even want to imagine what has happened there.”

“By the way, her three sizes starting from top are 91 – 63 – 89.”

“Why did that kind of information leak?!”

“She must certainly be self-confident with that, right?”

Lela truly did have a magnificent body.

In her jet black clothes two big bulges were rising, twice as big as Sherry's.

Furthermore, there was a slit in the cloth around the breast area from which one could peek at her cleavage.

I totally don't get why someone would put a gap in that place...

I wonder whether I should call someone who deliberately wears something like that incredible or not...

Hayate was in awe in front of that unusual design.

Then—— Lela's gaze turned into their direction.

“Scharlachrot. Who's that person?”

With an unexpected low tone, Lela inquired Sherry about Hayate.

“That's my manservant.”

“””””MANSERVANT?!”””””

everyone in the classroom caused a commotion at the extreme words that Sherry had readily said.

“M-Manservant, how is that different from a normal servant?”

“If one lives in the dorm, the academy maids do everything for them, right? A male servant isn't necessary, correct?”



“So a manservant does things that can’t be done by someone not being a man?”

“How filthy!”

Even more girls caused a horrible commotion.

“...Sherry Scharlachrot. I’ll ask once more. What’s that person?”

Only Lela kept calm, asking the same ordinary question once again.

“I made a slip. He’s not my manservant. He’s my contract beast.”

And Sherry returned an answer again.

“Eh?”

“A contract beast?”

“That’s absurd...”

“Impossible!”

The classroom got even noisier.

Lela struck the teacher’s desk once and calmed the noise down, then she asked something again:

“Sherry Scharlachrot. How long have you been enrolled in this academy?”

“About a month, Schwartz-sensei.”

“And, how often have I been present at your summoning rituals?”

“It takes three to four days to retry a messed-up summoning, so... About eight times, right?”

“Nine.”

Lela corrected her flat-out.

“And you ought to recall that the tenth try was arranged to be today after school, correct?”

“That’s how it was arranged.”

“And yet you called that man your contract beast.”

“Yes.”

“Though he appears to be human?”

“We’re still investigating whether he’s a person or a human-type contract beast.”

“What about the ceremony?”

“I’ve retried it myself.”

“Without my permission?”

“Please excuse my arbitrary behavior.”

“Do you have proof that this man is your contract beast?”

“The contract mark has emerged on his right hand. And I’ve already got the chairman’s approval to treat him as my contract beast. If you need to validate it, I could accompany you to the chairman office.”

“No. That’d be too bothersome. If the chairman approved of it, it’s fine.”

The black-clothed teacher declared readily.

“If that person’s your contract beast, control him properly. Like other contract beasts, if that man disturbs the lessons, he’ll have to bear with the punishment.”

“Of course, Schwartz-sensei.”

“Well then, we’ll begin the lesson.”

With that, Lela started the lesson as if she had lost interest in Hayate.

However, only she could take on that dry attitude.

The great majority of girls in this room handled it differently. Even now they were watching Hayate and Sherry with eyes full of curiosity.

“Is that even possible? A human and on top of that a *man* being summoned as a contract beast?”

“A human-type contract beast? I’ve never heard such a story.”

“I wonder whether she’ll treat that man as her contract beast?”

“Will he be put into the stables? Or... could he possibly be in her room?!”

“In other words, those two in a confined room?! Totally filthy!”

Yep, that feels creepy.

Being showered with all the girls' attention made him feel embarrassed.

While he had felt uncomfortable in all sorts of places, Lela's lesson ended.

The black-clothed teacher quickly left the classroom—— Simultaneously with her vanishing through the door, the girls rushed to Hayate all at once.

“Is it true that you're Sherry Scharlachrot's contract beast?”

“You look like an ordinary human... though you're a bit harder.”

“KYAA! That's the first time I've touched a boy's body!”

“Young men don't have breasts, right? My father has really imposing breasts, but...”

“Isn't your father just... considerably well-rounded?”

To the oncoming flood of questions, Hayate did nothing more than to simply recoil back into his chair. *I wonder if those ridiculously absurd questions about men are caused by all the girls being ojousamas?*

There were also girls among them that touched him all over the body.

He was almost treated like a rare animal.

And speaking of Sherry, ought to be his sole ally, she was forcefully pushed away by the crowd and by the time Hayate realized it, she had already been standing against a wall far away from him. She seemed to be pouting.

As you might expect, Hayate was also starting to get fed up by being jostled... At that time...

“Seriously! That you’re even lying about a man being your contract beast, what an utter scandal!”

...?

As he was wondering where that high voice came from all of a sudden, the classmates around Hayate divided.

“Victoria-san!”

Someone inside the divided crowd called the name of the girl that had appeared.

Victoria had vivid-blonde ringlet curls and was a bishoujo who could be proud of a body which rivaled Sherry’s. Her unyielding, almond-shaped eyes indicated a haughty character. Judging from the reaction of the surrounding people, she probably was this class’ leader.

Ringlet curls are quite the amazing hair style, huh...

Her hairstyle *was* amazing, but so was the serpent that twined around her body. A big one. A big serpent. With wings even. It was probably her contract beast.

Victoria drew closer and said with a high-handed attitude:

“What’s your name?”

“Hayate Mitsurugi.”

“Mitsurugi? I’ve never heard of such an family of nobility. Where were you born?”

“...Sorry, but I don’t have any memories that date back...”

He honestly answered and Victoria laughed scornfully as if to make fun of him.

“I’ve already heard that commoner men were shameless good-for-nothings, but it’s absolutely true, isn’t it? If everyone keeps touching him so much, they’ll be infected with the commoner bacillus.”

Some people drew their distance from Hayate after Victoria’s comment.

Even if he hadn’t liked being touched all over, that it stopped because of this... A bacillus...

Victoria got more and more talkative, maybe because she saw Hayate dropping his shoulders, thus she moved into gear:

“In the current period, desired men are profoundly cultivated and gentlemen... However, commoners lack both, so I’ve heard. And your face definitely proves that you’re a commoner.”

“...Mu...”

Hayate, who had felt down at first, was, of course, offended by what had been said up until now and stood up from his seat without hesitation.

“W-What is it?”

Due to Hayate’s sudden movement, Victoria stopped the bad-mouthing.

“If you’re treating a person like a bacillus... I might as well really touch and infect you!”

He said something without thinking only a child would say.

Not caring about the reaction of the rest, Hayate tried to touch Victoria up and extended both hands—— but forgot about the stairs.

“OWA—!”

“KYA—!”

He enveloped Victoria before he fell down and fell on top of her.

That hu—— didn’t hurt?

On the contrary, something felt good.

Wondering about the reason, he moved his face, and felt a soft sensation on both cheeks.

“Hyan—!”

And on top of that, there was the voice of an embarrassed girl.

Wh-What's going on?!

He stood up to confirm the situation and—— when he put strength into his hands, his fingers sunk deeper into something that had an unexpected good feel to it.

“Nyooo—!”

More and more lovely shrieks leaked from the girl.

And while we're at it, there was an unpleasant hunch that was expanding inversely proportional to the comfort felt by his face and hands inside him as well.

He timidly raised his face... and confirmed his current location.

“Wh... Wh... Wh—!”

Victoria's face was in front of his own—— The moment Hayate had fallen, he had plunged his face into the valley of her breasts. Furthermore, he had grabbed those two summits with all his strength.



“”””KYAAAAAAA”””””

The classmates had been watching the whole matter and raised numerous girly screams.

Surprised by the uproar around her, Victoria came back to herself.

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ME?!”

With all of her might, she kicked hayate off her while complaining.

“Gefu—!”

He leaked a muffled shriek as the kick landed in his solar plexus.

However, as one might expect, he didn't complain as he felt bad about the whole matter himself.

He held his stomach to bear with the pain and Victoria sat up in a girlish posture hugging her own body and began to quiver.

“You pervert... You *pervert*...!”

Her face turned pale for some reason.

Hayate, either from that unforeseeable turn of events or something else, forgot about his anger right away, panicked, and instead worried about her.

“O-Oi, are you alright?”

“Y-You...!”

The shivering Victoria raised her voice and stern eyes at him. Her expression was filled with serious hatred. However, there were also some tears in the corner of her eyes...

Hayate readied himself for whatever kind of abusive words would come flying.

But——

“What are you going to do if I got pregnant?!”

——The words Victoria threw at him greatly differed from his expectations.

Hayate and the noisy girls around him were speechless.

However, Victoria, the only person with teary eyes, raised her eyebrows and said with a shaking voice and blushed face:

“W-When a girl gets touched by a male commoner, they get pregnant, you know?! How on Earth do you plan to make up for that kind of responsibility?! No... something like making up for it would——”

She kept talking on and on.

It appeared that she was serious.

Of course, no matter whether they were commoner or noble men and women, touching alone wouldn't get anyone pregnant.

When I've been bombarded with questions earlier... These quaint ojousamas seemed to more or less have a very narrow view of how men work too. Victoria's thinking is also excessive... Is this here a case where people just talk about preconceptions without even having experienced the real thing themselves?

——In reality, Victoria had never seen any men except for her family, let alone touched or talked to. Even for the Diaspell Royal Academy she was an unusually sheltered, super-naive lady. She seemed to have been convinced that all her knowledge of men was fact, even though it was completely based on exaggerated rumors she had heard.

However, even though she was under the wrong impression, anybody would give up when faced with such a continuously shouting and sobbing appearance. Hayate was utterly perplexed...

“——Victoria-san. Could you please refrain from tormenting my contract beast?”

Before he knew it, Sherry, who should've been along the wall, was next to him and calmly talked to Victoria.

“Sherry Scharlachrot-san! It's the fault of that commoner you took as your companion that my chastity has been soiled! How do you intend to take responsibility?!”

“Well, scolding him for groping some breasts might already be fine, but... is it alright if I told you something?”

“What is it?!”

“Just getting your breasts touched by a man doesn’t get you pregnant.”

“Eh...?”

For a short time, Victoria, who had thrown a tantrum seconds ago, was motionless, then she surveyed the faces of the classmates around her.

...After a short time, she got arrived at the realization that she might’ve been wrong, stood up in a totally awkward and slow manner, and cleared her throat with a cough.

“A-Ahem... T-To begin with, Scharlachrot-san, this commoner is worthless as a contract beast and companion! You’re always involved with the commoners in this town, something a noble must not do! This time, you got hold of a companion by paying him, right?!”

Victoria intended to make Sherry responsible for her awkward mistake just now. This gave off the feeling that she just took diversion to the extreme.

“What are you trying to say? He’s my contract beast. Chairman Shanse also approved of him as such. Do you intend to defy the chairman’s decision?”

Sherry didn’t care about Victoria’s intentions and flatly flicked the facts at her.

“...Th...”

Victoria felt ashamed as the chairman’s name came up... Her eyes teared up again.

“YOU’RE NOTHING BUT A LOW-CLASS NOBLE AND YET YOU’RE SO INSOLEEEEENT!”

Victoria gave up and ran right out of the classroom shouting. After she disappeared, the girls’ crowd around Hayate broke up too for some reason.

“Yare, yare. She left at last, didn’t she?”

Sherry shrugged and sat down.

Hayate also heaved a totally exhausted sigh and sat down next to her.

Victoria ended up being absent for two periods but before the third period started, she returned with slightly red eyes.

When she entered the classroom, she gave them a stern glare, but Hayate as well as Sherry ignored it.

Because of that, the attitude of those two seemed to irritate Victoria even more, but when she returned to her seat, several people, seemingly her friends, went to and consoled her. When Victoria heard their voices, her expression softened up and she started to talk to them with a smiling face.

Which reminds me...

Suddenly he realized something.

Even though the third period was already about to start, nobody had come to Sherry and nobody had sat down by her. When Hayate had been bombarded with questions, she was also literally driven into a corner...

“Hey... could you perhaps be hated here?”

“*PIERCE*—”

“GYAA!”

He had been stabbed into the flank with a sharp pen.

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!”

“You’ve hurt my feelings just now. Learn to be more delicate.”

“Ngu—!”

Certainly, the way he asked that just now had lacked a bit of consideration.

“Then... why’s this treated as a deadzone?”

“*STABSTAB*—”

“GYAA!”

“Do you plan to poke my delicate heart full of holes?”

“Is that delicate thing taking revenge by poking holes into me?!”

Eventually, the lessons for the day ended and Hayate was woken up by the sound of the bell which signaled that school was over.

“Faa... It’s finally over, huh?”

“You slept quite well, didn’t you?”

“I’m not a student here, so it doesn’t really matter, right?”

“Well, today was all theory. There weren’t any practical lessons, so I don’t really mind. I’d appreciate it if you didn’t continue muttering perverted nonsense in your sleep while next to me, though.”

“Eh?!”

*What’s she going on about? I can’t remember doing that.
Well, I was sleeping, it’s only natural I can’t.*

“It was a joke.”

“...”

I take back the feelings of shame and guilt I almost had.

“Now then, let’s go, shall we?”

“Ah, wait!”

He chased after Sherry who was walking off and brought himself beside her.

“You’re a bit close, aren’t you?”

“I’m not that close.”

“Can you please be a bit further away from me?”

“Why?”

“Would you be so kind as to separate yourself from me a little more?”

“You just said the same thing more politely!”

Does she dislike me that that much?! Am I really such a bother to be around?! I’m walking with a woman who’s taking advantage of someone’s shortcomings just to abuse them here! But I’ve got no other choice, do I...

In this sanctum of women, called Diaspell Royal Academy, a man had appeared. And to top it off, the rumor that he had been called here as a contract beast had already spread throughout the academy like a wildfire.

There was what had happened between Victoria and him, and although he had been making sure to keep his distance from her, no matter where he went, he always became the center of attention – just as if he was some rare species.

He absolutely didn’t want to wander around this place by himself.

“Are we going back to the dorm?”

He asked her such an obvious thing to break the ice.

“Yes, for now. I’ll be going out later, though.”

“Why?”

Going by what he had heard, the next day was a weekday too, so there’d be normal lessons.

Now that I think about it, didn’t Victoria say something like Sherry’d always be in town doing stuff... ?

I also recall that something like associating with commoners wouldn't fit a noble...

“You’re coming as well.”

“You need me to carry stuff?”

“You’re mistaken.”

Sherry quickly rejected Hayate’s guess.

“It’s a part time job.”

“What?”

——A somewhat unexpected answer had appeared.

A part time job. In short, working for money.

This was Hayate’s first experience doing part time, though he didn’t know why he could recall that.

Sherry led him to a certain place named ‘Bury-In Café’, about twenty minutes by foot away from the academy.

He had been fine before arriving there. Although, to be honest, he did feel a little bit excited.

And now...

“SO BUSYYYYYYYYY!”

“If you’ve got time to complain, then you might as well keep your hands moving, greenhorn!”

He was currently in the middle of regretting his excitement. As soon as he got there, he was thrown into the café's kitchen. In there, he was being subject to a storm of orders that swept across him minute after minute.

“Still haven't got that parfait ready?!”

“Alright, coming!”

“You prepared that drink?!”

“Alright, coming!”

“The spaghetti's late, what are you doing in there?!”

“SORRYYYYYY!”

The manager of the cafe gave off an 'Ane-san' kind of impression, like what one would get from a beautiful, energetic woman who had her sleeves rolled all the way up to her shoulders. That being said, just as her appearance indicated, her tone was stern. She wasn't even trying to go easy on the cooking of the newcomer who had only just started in the kitchen.

Hayate was holding a book with instructions on how to cook each dish in one hand and was frantically said cooking with the other. But the pile of order slips seemed to rather multiply than decrease.

They say that the kitchen's a chef's battlefield, evidently, that was the case exactly.

“Get to work already!”

“I'M ON IIIIT!”

On the surface it was reputed for its fanciness, and yet behind the scenes it was almost like a hectic, living hell.

Eventually, the number of new customers that came in decreased and Hayate was able to take a break for the first time since he had started six hours ago.

I should be thankful just for being given a break, but somehow this feels...

When the manager informed him that he could take a break, she'd said, ‘Well, today's your first, so I think I can forgive this much.’ If so, what would happen from tomorrow onwards?

“If this keeps up I might collapse...”

He let out a sigh while he had his meal in the corner of the kitchen.

Mixing spices in with some of the leftover meat and then cooking it all together like crazy – something like that turned out to taste unreasonably good. He finally realized the reason for the success of this place.

It was honestly more suited to his tastes than the refined dishes which he had tried in the cafeteria of the ojousama school.

“Whew~”

After finishing up the bonus dessert that came with his meal, he finally let out a sigh.

He still had some free time left.

Now that I think of it, I wonder what Sherry has been up to the entire time?

She should've been waiting tables.

Sometimes he could hear her voice when an order came, but as he was too busy working and moving around, he hadn't even gotten a single glimpse of her.

“...Alright.”

For once, lets observe how Sherry works.

If only she had enjoyable work, he'd surely take the opportunity to complain.

Deciding this in his heart, Hayate went to the passage that lead from the kitchen to the hall.

Even if one could call it a path, it almost looked like a storage room. The utensils that were used in the hall and kitchen had been piled up here and there.

They were acting like a cushion by being piled up on either sides of the space between hall and kitchen, no sounds could leak through from either sides.

He secretly took a peek into the hall from the other side of the path.

It was like a battlefield in there—— a completely different world compared to the kitchen.

There were about twenty tables, all filled, but not a man could be seen. The target group was female commoners and there were no noble ojousamas like from the Diaspell Royal Academy.

——The dominance of women on this continent had been taking root since ancient times.

Only hexenritter were able to stand up to the demonic beasts that threatened mankind.

And only women held the magical power necessary to become one.

That alone was reason enough to judge women superior to men, but the ‘women above men’ tendency was also affecting the commoners. Even if they didn’t hold as much magical power as nobles, they could at least become witches as long as they properly studied magic.

Magic used by regular humans was weak and not suited for battle with a demonic beast, but it helped plenty with people’s daily lives. Be it either cultivating the fields or carrying heavy things, if one used magic, everything became a trivial matter.

Incidentally, magic-wielding women were much stronger than trained men.

Men or women, considering the duties of women, protecting the families they had been born into and bringing up the children, it was obvious which one had the upper hand in regards of social standing. One could say that it was only natural that men didn't approach and even avoided a place like this café where women met up in.

——So, speaking of Sherry...

“Sherry-chan.”

“Sherry-chaaan, please come heeere.”

“Heeey, Sherry!”

This was a mature atmosphere.

When she was done taking orders from one table, she was immediately called from another. They were calling her with loud voices without caring about the distance. Even though some of them were closer to other employees, they went as far as to wait until *she* was free.

There were enough people coming and going that she certainly didn't have the time to take a break now.

Or was she perhaps far more busier than he was a few moments ago and had just kept working?

But rather than her workload itself, the main reason that had drained the will to complain from Hayate was something else.

Ribbons in various colors were here and there on her body.

She was wearing a snow-white, thrilled Alice band.

And twintails that made the usual cool her look very childish.

All of that put together on a, in some areas dangerously short but nevertheless lovely, apron dress.

When one combined all the above mentioned factors, they'd get——

“——Just like a maid...”

Yes, currently Sherry totally looked like a maid.

I mean, she... she's able to smile like that?

While Hayate was at a loss for words, he kept staring at her visiting table after table.

If one had to phrase it properly, then ‘fascinated’ would be the right word.

That Sherry... Even when she was threatened by the chairman or that ex-knight teacher, she didn't falter. When she was bearing the slender, she stuck to arrogance. A girl with such a wicked tongue and nerves of steel, now her body was disguised like a waitress and he was touched to see her working bravely like this.

He heard afterwards that it was a ‘maid cafe’ that had been started by the manager. The waitresses here were only wearing maid outfits. However, they collected beautiful girls by paying good and picking strictly—— As a result, even though there were only a few other shops more expensive than them, they still managed to rake in the customers daily.

Hayate stood in the path staring blankly. Carrying orders that couldn't be counted with two hands anymore, Sherry walked in his direction and came across him.

“What are you idling around for? I wonder if you’re asking for punishment?”

“I’m on break now.”

“Ara, is that so? Too bad.”

“What do you mean by ‘too bad’... Forget that, that’s some amazing dress you got.”

“This? I don’t like it too much, but I seem to have a good reputation in it. The manager also increases my pay for wearing it, you know?”

“Yeah...”

Without thinking, he started to voice his agreement but in the end, obediently agreeing to something like that was kind of vexing for him... He changed his mind and tried to change the topic.

“Or rather, aren’t all the people attending the academy rich ojousamas? Why are you doing this part time job?”

He had asked this without really thinking about it. He wanted to switch the topic after all, but it took her a few seconds to reply.

“...That’s not true.”

“Eh?”

He didn't understand too well and reflexively asked again.

Sherry heaved a sigh.

“My family's not rich. Our property was seized and everything collapsed. So I'm earning an income here to pay the school's expenses.”

“...”

Hayate didn't know what to say.

She heaved another sigh, bigger than the last.

“That's how it is, so you get to work right away too, please. Those who don't work shall not eat, right?”

With perfect timing, the manager's voice resounded and called Hayate from the kitchen.

It appeared that his break was over...

“Yeah, yeah...”

Hayate pictured the start of that hellish work again and sighed.

“I-I'm beat...”

Hayate declared and fell flat.

It was the floor of Sherry's bedroom. As expected, he couldn't really bring himself to collapse onto a girl's bed.

The master of this bedroom was currently in the middle of bathing.

By the way, this was situated on the third floor. You might be wondering how hot water was brought all the way up there, but it seemed that in this world something called materia existed which was composed of a ‘magic preservation stone’. By making use of the water magic inside the stone, it seemed that students were able to fill and take a bath even when there were circumstances that prevented them from using the dorm’s public bath.

Naturally, as there were only girls at this academy, there was no reason to have separate baths, so Hayate had planned to also use this room’s bathtub after her.

But... then again...

splash

From across the wall, he could hear the sounds of water splashing in the bathtub and sherry moving her body around.

I mean... in the presence of a guy she's able to just enter the bath like nothing...

I've thought from the start that I'm not even being seen as a man...

However, whether he should feel frustrated or sad, when he thought about how her naked body was exposed on the other side of the wall... his body didn't want to move an inch, heavy from a mysterious power.

splash

The sound of splashing water again.

“Haa...”

Then the sigh of a young lady relaxing.

If Hayate stayed here any longer he'd probably go crazy, so he made an effort to creep away and escaped from her room.

Well then... I don't have anywhere particular to go, but I need to kill time until she gets out of the bathtub. I've got a bad feeling about wandering this around girls-only place, but... if I were to pick between that room and this, I guess the latter would be better for my sanity.

Hayato tried to be sneaky enough not to be seen at all, and so he irresponsibly walked through the dorm without an idea of where he was going.

Perhaps one could call it lucky, but in the corridor, illuminated by the light magic the materia was charged with, were hardly any living beings. It was already late, perhaps everyone had gone to their respective rooms and passed their time in privacy.

And yet, from time to time, he caught sight of girls walking the corridor alone, but... the ladies in here probably didn't have the courage to come and talk to a man face-to-face. As soon as they saw Hayate, each one turned their heel and left as if on the run.

I don't like to be goggled at, but this hurts too...

It was a complicated feeling.

Well, walking around to kill time is just the right thing to divert myself with, Hayate had explored the dorm for a little while already.

Soon, he discovered the dining hall which was still open, he received a cold drink from the kitchen maid that was stocking up for tomorrow... When she handed over the glass, she made a very complicated expression.

Were the people in this girls-only academy that troubled over how to deal with the only man present...?

He gulped down the drink thinking about this and—— collided with a girl that appeared just around the corner.

“UWA—!”

“KYA—!”

Their shrieks overlapped.

Hayate only ended up staggering, but the other person seemed to have fallen down.

“Sorry. Are you alright...?”

“Yeah, I'm fine, I'm fine...”

The girl had fallen on her behind, but she got up with a refreshing smile.

She gently dusted off her butt... and suddenly stared at Hayate's face.

“Oya? Are you perhaps Sherry-kun’s contract beast-kun?”

“Ehh... that’s...”

He was fine with replying to something that still sounded unfamiliar, but he was somewhat opposed to the idea of being called a contract *beast*.

So he naturally hesitated to answer, when suddenly the other person shifted her gaze downwards.

He wondered what she was thinking and looked down on the clothes he was wearing—— and a big stain was spreading out on them. It seemed like he had spilled his drink when they had collided earlier.

He was lucky that the other person didn’t suffer the same fate, but... it was troubling nonetheless.

“Ah, what should I do now?”

He said as he didn’t have a change of clothes at hand. Neither did he have spare underwear.

So, if you were to ask what he intended to do once he’d have gotten out of the bath after Sherry, frankly, he hadn’t thought about that at all.

“Arara, you alright?”

This time *he* was being worried about.

Then he suddenly noticed that the girl wasn't very bashful towards her male dialog partner, and once again observed the other's looks.

A girl with gender-neutral looks, wearing evenly cut, red hair that reached the top of her shoulders. Depending on how one looked at her, she could've been a handsome boy as well. Speaking of which, her tone was also kind of boy-ish.

If it weren't for the bulges on her chest, one could easily be misled.

Even though it was that late, she still hadn't taken her bath, it seemed – the girl was still wearing the academy uniform. An owl with a metallic brilliance was perched on her shoulder.

“Hm? Ah, this young one here? That's Miria—— A miming contract beast. My precious friend.”

“How's it different from other contract beasts?”

“Because it's a machine spirit, you see. It's unique even among contract beasts. The body can be called mechanical too.”

“Hee—”

Even if he was told that it was mechanical, he didn't get it, but nodded nonetheless.

“Though, if we were to be talking about peculiarness, it's nowhere near your level.”

“...”

“Oops, that reminds me that I haven’t introduced myself. I’m Aria Weisheit. The head of Rivaldi – the class of your master. You don’t remember me?”

“Eehm... sorry.”

That time he had been busy with bearing the gazes of everyone, so he hadn’t perceived his surroundings too much.

However, she didn’t appear to mind that he couldn’t recall her either.

“Well, it’s fine. Nice to meet you.”

She said and went for a handshake.

Handshake—— A kind of cultural act between people of equal standing. Unfortunately, Aria seemed to see Hayate as a contract beast, but he was deeply moved nonetheless. He almost fell in love there. Could love be that simple?

“My name’s Hayate. Likewise, nice to meet——”

“Oooh! I knew it, the structure of your palm’s kinda human just like your appearance! A little hard maybe!”

“Eh? Ah? Yes?”

He was bewildered from Aria. Out of the blue, her spirits had risen just when she had grasped his hand and so he had gulped down what he had been planned to say.

Her eyes were sparkling and she started to feel all over his body. The way she touched him, in contrast to Sherry or even the girls from the Rivaldi class, was much more... persistent.

“Sweeet, I’ve also tried to touch and talk to you in the classroom, you know?! But everyone besieged you back then and my hands just couldn’t reach!”

“Kyuu!”

Her Servant seemed to agree with a high-pitched cry.

“Hee... CHI!”

He tried to say something but only sneezed.

Now that he thought of it, his clothes were still soaking wet. His body seemed to have grown cold while he was standing around talking.

When she saw Hayate with his trembling shoulders, Aria went ‘Alright’ and beat her chest.

“You’ll catch a cold like that. Follow me!”

“Eh?”

“It’s half my fault. I’d feel bad if you caught a cold.”

She said, caught his hand, and left the corridor with him like that.

Although the handshake from just a second ago had been similar to this, just by being held gently like this somehow made him happy regardless. And without thinking, Hayate ended up being dragged along by her.

Soon, they both arrived in front of a large double door.

“We’re here.”

Aria said and brought Hayate into that room.

It appeared to be considerably spacious in there. Easily 70 or 80 people could fit in here. Soft mats had been spread out on the smoothly coated floor.

Furthermore, there was a great number of shelves inside the room and numerous baskets out of bamboo had been set up in many of those shelves. From what he could see, most of them were empty, but... why? He felt like he had seen something like that before. Couldn't he remember because of his amnesia?

He wracked his brain thinking such things, when——

“Alright, let's strip.”

“...Wait, haaa?!”

——Aria suddenly said something outrageous.

“If your clothes stay wet, you'll probably catch a cold.”

“O-Oi...”

“Don't worry. There are no rules which state that contract beasts mustn't enter here. If it wasn't so late you'd shock the people around you of course, right?”

“Wait! I'm a human!”

“That's still under investigation, or so Sherry says, right? Besides, a human-type contract beast might be rare, but a human himself being summoned as a contract beast, there's not even a shred of information on a case like that. So you're precious either way, you know?”

Please don't talk about humans like they're some kind of rare item.

“I love contract beasts. I want to socialize with you naked. And, if possible, from head to toe do all sorts of investigations.”

“N-Naked—?!”

Thereupon, Hayate finally realized that he had been in the dressing room of a large bath house. There were large bamboo baskets placed in compartments on a shelf along the wall for people to put their clothes in. They were practically empty, so it seemed that not many people were inside, but at least the girl in front of his eyes had set her mind on entering the bathhouse together with him.

“Alright, hurry up.”

Aria was drawing near while her fingers moved around excitedly.

Hayate's survival instinct was crying havoc.

“Eehm... A-Ah... I just remembered there's... something I must— Sorry, sometime else—”

He muttered in monotone and ran off in a dash.

“You're trying to escape?! Miria!”

“Kyuu!”

Following Aria's order, the mechanical owl came attacking from the air.

“Owa—! That’s unexpectedly strong!”

“Kyuu~u!”

That there was that kind of power hidden inside that small body... Quickly, Hayate was seized by the head and lifted into the air... Or rather... *Ouch, ouch, ouch! You’re ripping my head off!*

“Take it down!”

“Leave it to me...”

“NOT MY PANTS!”

Hayate kept struggling, but he couldn’t help it with both feet off the ground.

“It’s fine, just calm down. Once the clothes are put into the basket, they’ll be washed until tomorrow morning. There’s a spare bathrobe to change into as well.”

“That’s nothing to calm down about at all!”

Plus, as he was lifted into the air by Miria, he could look down from up high and there he noticed some girl’s clothes that had been put into the baskets. So someone was still in there—— Wasn’t Hayate being exposed in the dressing room already bad enough?!

“LET! ME! GO!”

“Hey, hey, it’s difficult to get your underwear off like that, alright!”

Hayate had put up some desperate resistance, but Aria had skillfully pulled his pants off and now she tried to lay her hands on the last stronghold.

This was no longer a case where he could hold back just because the other person was a girl. He mustered all his strength and put up his final struggle.

“Uu...UGAA!”

“Kuu—”

The instant Miria’s strength loosened, he managed to escape.

“Ah! You’re escaping again?!”

Aria was persistent.

“You want to see what’s in my pants so much?!”

“I wanna!”

“Don’t say that so brazenly!”

He was forced to run all around in the dressing room, but having his pants tangling his legs made it difficult to run, though he didn’t have the time to put his pants on.

Does she really plan to strip me all over?!

“Ku—!”

He dodged the claws of the owl that was swooping down from above and somehow managed to struggle his way up to the double doors.

If I can somehow get outside...!

Out of impatience Hayate didn't check the label that was hung on top of the door and flung it open.

“_____”

That moment, he stopped.

At least Hayate's head felt like it stopped.

splash... The sound of a falling drop of water echoed awfully loud.

The door he had opened, of which he thought would lead to the corridor—— lead into the bath house instead.

Although there weren't many people at this late hour... they weren't nil.

As far as he could tell there were about five women of marriageable age in there—— of course all naked—— they suddenly broke out in a big ruckus and stared at the man who had invaded their bath.

“...?”

One girl seemed to have been about to exit the bath house and thus extended her hand towards the door now, she had a particularly puzzled expression on her face.

Her build was fairly small and if one just went by what could be seen, she seemed to be two or three years younger.

Her amber-colored hair clung to her forehead, tingled with moisture.

It was probably just too unexpected for her that a man could appear in this kind of place... The only thing in her hand was the sponge that she had probably used to wash her body, but she didn't have a single thing with which she could have covered her stark-naked white skin.

Nonetheless it would've been better if she had crouched down and covered her private matters with her hands and arms, but she was so dumbfounded that she didn't move at all.

She wasn't the only one who didn't move an inch. Hayate was the same.

If I move just a bit, she'll probably scream like hell...

Then again, he couldn't stay like this forever.

He hesitated about what was the right thing to do now...

“Oya, Kiruru. You're in here too?”

Aria peeked into the bath house from behind him and called the naked girl's name.

The girl with the amber-colored hair—— Kiruru suddenly came back to herself from that voice.

“N-NOOOOOOOOO!”

BAAAAAAAAM!

Together with a shrill scream, Hayate was hit with a magnificent slap in the face.



“Just what on Earth were you doing at the time I got out of the bath and no one was in my room?”

“...”

After that, he had almost been handed over to the dorm parent, but Sherry had heard the uproar and had, somehow, mediated with Aria. The situation had been subdued eventually.

There were no rules that forbid a Servant to enter the bath... Was what Aria had argued, although her reasoning was a bit coercive if one followed up on that. Well, he had been saved thanks to this.

However, from tomorrow onwards he'd certainly receive some dead looks.

“Haa...”

Hayate heaved a very deep sigh.

By the way, Hayate wasn't wearing his wet clothes anymore. Without him knowing, Sherry had asked the chairman to arrange a male uniform for him.

——Diaspell Royal Academy, a place where hexenritter were raised which only girls could become. In short, there was no possibility that men could study here, so originally there shouldn't have been a male uniform, but... despite that, it seemed that the craftsman who designed the uniform for the academy had also created one set of a male uniform for fun.

That ‘phantom of a male uniform’ which had neither a person to wear it nor had been planned to be worn – the chairman had taken it out of the warehouse especially for Hayate.

“Don’t forget to say your thanks to the chairman later.”

“Yeah...”

The collar of the uniform was cramped, but it had been done inexpensively and was easy to move in. Even though he had been handed a fresh change of clothes, Hayate’s heart didn’t lighten up at all as he was picturing the depressing life that’d wait for him from tomorrow onwards.

Seeing him in low spirits, Sherry heaved a completely indifferent sigh.

“I seriously wonder... Did you want to see the girls naked so much?”

“That’s not it!”

“Even if you deny it, it hasn’t any credibility, you know?”

“Gununu...!”

“Well, spending your time together with a flower on a high peak such as me, you seem to have unfortunately lost control over your manly desires, am I right? It’s not like I don’t understand that sort of feeling either. If you can’t reach the stars in the sky, try to be get by with substitutes around you, right?”

“Did you just go and compare yourself with high-peaked flowers and stars?”

If that's so, then I think it'd be great if she'd also get some affection into her behavior.

“By the way, when I said that I knew that feeling, it was a lie. Peeking into the girl’s bath out of frustration, that’s the deed of a brute. If you’ve got any sense of shame, why would you do this? You pervert.”

“I won’t ask for something like love or extravagance, so at least show me some mercy!”

“Eh? You want to die without suffering?”

“That’s the kind of mercy you show a dying soldier on the battlefield! As you can see, I’m going hard!”

“You’re hard?”

Her gaze turned to Hayate’s ‘section’.

“GOING! HARD! Seriously, those dirty jokes of yours as well as that salty mouth—?! They’re frightening!”

“That’s the taste of a lady.”

Sherry said with a prim expression and brushed the hair that had been hanging over her ear behind it with her fingers.

She had just gotten out of the bath and was properly sitting on a chair with her hair tied up behind her back. Hayate stood up because of his current position. Right now, he had seen her nape when she tilted her head a bit, and he could easily take a peek at her skin from the gap of the bathrobe – all this made his blood rush to the head.

...While Hayate's face began the blush, he sat down on the floor cross-legged.

"Haa... Geez. If I had to be summoned, I'd rather have gone to Aria's place."

"Ara, why that?"

"She's treating her contract beast with utmost care, right?"

She had showered him with much affection and, well, had been somewhat perverted, but that was still much more easygoing than his current environment with being forced to work, verbally abused, and whatnot.

"Well... that's true. The chairman also spoke about the holiness of the summoning ritual. Similarly, contract beasts are important partners, a fragment of oneself, there are also many hexenritter who consider them matchless buddies in arms."

"I'd certainly want to experience that kind of joy too."

He said cynically, but Sherry answered with a composed expression.

"Ara? I wonder, weren't you the one who went, 'I'm a human!'"?

"Ugu..."

"Only nobles can acquire the necessities of life without doing at least a minimum of work, you know?"

"You're also a noble, right?"

“All crumbled into ruins, everything closed down, remember?”

‘Well...’, Sherry made a brief pause.

“Putting aside whether you’re human or just a human-type contract beast... But... even if I summoned a normal one, I’d probably never become friends with them.”

“...? ...Why?”

Sherry didn’t reply right away, she corrected her posture and turned herself into Hayate’s direction.

Her white legs extended towards him from the fringe of her bathrobe, and he stared right back at her while he was being as cautious as possible to not let his attention be diverted in that direction.

“Certainly, it’s said that hexenritter should treat their contract beasts as something precious. And besides, I agree with that. However, I’ll absolutely never call them something like partners, not to mention friends—— that would be a deception.”

“Deception?”

“Contract beasts must be absolutely obedient to a hexenritter’s commands, I already told you that before, right? But a contract beast has a mind of its own. It eats and sleeps. Even if they’re of the same race, because of their individuality, they slightly differ in character. They have their own life and personality—— and yet we completely disregard that.

“...”

“I don’t exactly know where contract beasts come from. There are people who claim that they’re being summoned from a parallel universe. At any rate, they’re summoned for us hexenritter, they’re forced to fight for our sake. At times, they lose their lives as a shield. They don’t have any right to deny. I wonder, can that really be seen as an equal relationship?”

“That’s...”

“I don’t really have the intention to look down on how other hexenritter think. Aria-san treats her contract beast with great care and no one lets their contract beast die without regret... but I can’t do that.”

Sherry shook her head slightly.

“That’s why I would never call my contract beast a partner or a friend. It’s impossible for me to talk as if hexenritter and contract beast were on equal standing. I’ll call them manservants so that I don’t end up with some grandiose tale like, ‘he died to protect the hexenritter’. I don’t want to forget for a moment that I’m some unsightly creature that values my own intentions over those of the contract beasts and am trying to kill off their one life for the sake of my own goal.”

Hayate listened to her words until the end. At first he had simply thought that all was just willful talking.

As far as he could tell, either the students or Aria, all treated their contract beasts with great care. They were properly looking after them and even took them along to the bath. And the contract beasts which were being taken care of like that seemed to love that girls too. Eventually, just the two of them would set out together and they'd end up fighting demonic beasts. If the contract beasts died in battle with a demonic beast, they'd be entombed and even the hexenritter would surely grieve over their partner.

Sherry herself didn't negate the idea to greatly care for contract beasts. She had even declared herself that she'd surely do that herself—— However, she couldn't ignore the gap, the matter of absolute obedience, that existed between hexenritter and contract beasts.

They were willfully summoned, made to fight for the hexenritter's own convenience, and therefore forced to risk their life in the matter... Certainly, in this world no one would dare to ignore those matters and use beautiful words to dress up a speech about the relationship between hexenritter and contract beasts, stare them directly in the eye, and deceive them.

“You...”

Why are you trying to become a hexenritter then? Hayate stopped mid sentence.

What was her intention and goal for which she tried to become a hexenritter even though she declared herself that she'd become an unsightly creature? Before Hayate could finish saying that all——

“Well then, enough talking. Let’s go to bed soon.”

——Sherry said and threw off her bathrobe.

“UWAAAAA!”

Hayate raised his voice without any consideration for his neighbor and threw himself face down to the floor.

But still, Hayate had perfectly seen it.

“Why are you shouting all of a sudden?”

“WHY ARE YOU STRIPPING ALL OF A SUDDEN?!?”

“I can’t go to bed in a bathrobe, right?”

In other words, she stripped to change? If that’s the case, please tell me beforehand!

“Well, I’m done already.”

Hearing that gave Hayate peace of mind, he turned around, and what was there before him was... Sherry wearing a negligee that was somehow even more erotic than her being naked.

“What’s with that getup?!?”

“I can’t sleep when I’m not lightly dressed.”

That was some intelligence he hadn’t heard before.

Sherry really went to bed in that getup.

“I’m turning off the lights.”

The room was illuminated by materia charged with light magic. She only recited a simple chant and surprisingly the room was wrapped in darkness.

“C-Can’t you wait a sec longer?”

“Good night.”

Sherry quickly fell asleep, perhaps due to her tiredness her sleeping breath could be heard soon after.

Hayate was tired himself. He fumbled the uniform’s jacket off somehow and lay down on the floor with the borrowed blanket wrapped around him.

Thanks to the soft blanket and carpet, his body didn’t hurt too much, and so he was able to be fast asleep until the next morning.

Chapter 2: The Day He Became a Manservant

The next morning. If he got up now and everything that happened was just a dream... he would've felt relieved. But unfortunately it wouldn't be so convenient. The first thing he saw after waking up was Sherry putting on her knee socks.

“Morning.”

“...Morning.”

After exchanging greetings, Hayate also got ready to dress himself. Just like the previous day, they finished breakfast in the dining hall and went to the classroom together.

“Which reminds me, would you happen to need pyjamas?”

“I’d be grateful if you could get me some.”

“Though, you wouldn’t need them if you just slept in underwear like I do, no?”

“I need pyjamas! Please arrange them for me, please do!”

“If you’re even begging me, then I’ve got no other option, I guess.”

“What do you mean, ‘other option’...”

Hayate heaved a bored sigh.

After that, the soft gossiping of the girls around him reached his ears.

“Hey, that one... is that the rumored commoner?”

“They say he swiftly tried to peek into the baths last night.”

“As expected, men are just beasts...”

“Licentious beast...”

It appeared as if yesterday’s bath story had already spread throughout the school.

Even under normal circumstances just being a man would’ve been enough to be treated like an alien element here, but now he was seen as filth even.

Please, just forgive me...

Walking while shedding tears, Hayate noticed a familiar face standing in front of the big school building.

“What’s up, Hayate-kun?”

Aria got up from the wall she was leaning on and walked towards him while waving her hand.

“...I’ll go ahead, okay?”

Probably sensing that the girl had business with Hayate, Sherry left those words and entered the building.

When she did that, it had already been impossible to ignore Aria——recalling how she had almost stripped him off his underwear yesterday——he decided to let her be the one to come.

“What do you want?”

“Hm, right right. I wanted to apologize for yesterday.”

By ‘yesterday’ she probably meant said bath matter.

“When it gets to contract beasts, I just run wild – it’s been like that since back in the day, you see? But taking you along into the bath wasn’t as smart as I thought.”

“Well, you stuck up for me after that. So if you understand now, it’s no...”

“If I wanted to to examine you thoroughly, then I should’ve meekly brought you to my room.”

“YOU DON’T GET IT AT ALL!”

The corruption was far from improving.

Being alone with this contract beast maniac... he didn’t know what would happen.

“I did come to apologise in the first place, but in case there’s something you don’t know or worry about, you can ask me any time. I’ll help you as much as I can.”

“Things I worry about, huh...”

Or I don’t know about...

I’ve already got a bunch of things to worry about, but... right now, there’s one thing on my mind that I do not know about.

“Hey...”

“What up?”

“...Why does Sherry attend this academy?”

He didn't mean to say that Diaspell Royal Academy was bad or anything.

Even though he had only spent a bit more than one day with her, he already had enough of an idea that she was being bullying by her peers.

She had been ostracised in the classroom and without using the school baths or the large public bath, she did her bath routine in her own room.

During class, She was insulted behind her back and as soon as classes were over, she went to work and passed her time busily.

“I've heard by chance that she wants to become ‘the strongest hexenritter’, but why would she have such a painful wish? Wouldn't living happily with her family in her own home be better than having that kind of wish...”

“...Yeah, you don't know about it, do you? Her home—the Scharlachrot Family...”

Aria's expression went slightly grim... It looked like a subject that she didn't really wanted to touch.

“Want to know about her?”

Yet, Aria asked again, as if taking responsibility for the what she had just said.

If he nodded, she'd surely tell him.

Hayate didn't understand himself why he went as far as to want to know about Sherry's background...

“...Yeah, I wanna know. Please tell me about it.”

Afternoon, the same day.

“Practical lessons?”

“Yeah. We’re going to the practice grounds.”

After putting away her books from the previous lesson, Sherry accompanied Hayate out of the classroom.

“What practical stuff will we do there?”

“Let’s see. The midterms are getting close... Today we should have a mock battle with other hexenritter.”

Sherry said without delay, but...

“So that means fighting, right...? Will you be okay?”

“Hexenritter are expected to fight demonic beasts, you know? People who even lose their nerves in a mock battle shouldn’t be in this academy to begin with.”

Saying that, she took him along to a giant dome-like building.

The practices grounds were divided into three big areas plus indoor facilities to pursue combat training.

Firstly, the dome’s outer perimeter was intended for individual special training.

Ten rooms were prepared for each respective kind of special training. Students chose the room with the subject they wanted to practise in from among them and entered – so was its structure.

Secondly, the outdoor battle area which occupied the right half of the dome.

It simulated an open air battle in similar conditions as with a demonic beasts. For this, gravel, plants, rocks, and other obstacles had been laid out. It tried to imitate an open battlefield.

Lastly, occupying the left side of the dome—— there was the mock battle area, where the practical lesson would be held in.

“Quite spacious, huh?”

Hayate, who'd entered the area, expressed almost instantly. It was considerably vast precisely because it was a practice field for hexenritter.

The ground and walls were made of a super-hard stone called mithril. White lines were taped on the ground. Those white lines were ten meters long each and the area had a total of five arenas shaped like squares. The mock battles would be carried out in those rings measuring ten meters in each direction.

“Well then, we'll begin the practical lesson now. Today we'll have the mock battles that you lowlifes have been eagerly waiting for. ‘Cause in the first month you did nothing but practice how to use your powers, right?”

Talking in front of the lined-up students was the homeroom teacher Lela.

Five other teachers were on stand-by behind her. Those five would probably referee each ring individually while Lela toured all of them.

“You hear me? Don’t you try to skip a proper warm-up. Although you’ve got the [Divine Protection of Valhalla] inside the practice grounds, if you don’t make it a habit, you’ll be endangering your life once push comes to shove.”

With the appearance of a term he didn’t know, Hayate whispered into Sherry’s ear next to him:

“What’s that [Divine Protection of Valhalla]?”

“A kind of ancient magic. It’s not applied to someone individually, but to a whole field. If you enter the [Divine Protection of Valhalla], ‘A warrior can never die’.”

“You serious?!”

But this surprisingly convenient magic he had heard about had all kinds of restrictions.

First of all, there had to be a massive quantity of mithril inside the field which the magic was applied to. This could easily be fulfilled if large quantities were brought from someplace else like in the practice grounds’ case, or if the ground itself held a large number of it, so that wouldn’t be a big problem.

Next, the effect only applied in a fight between warriors.

“Only between warriors... How does it distinguish between people’s occupations?”

“It doesn’t really need to see a résumé for that, you know? The important thing is to not lose your will to fight, no matter what happens. The [Divine Protection of Valhalla] is granted to, ‘Those endowed with the will to fight’ after all.”

That’s why the divine protection is granted to warriors...

“By the way, when the opponent is a demonic beast, the [Divine Protection of Valhalla]’s useless. They’re no warriors, just plain beasts. Even if we fought them in such a field, if we suffer damage, we usually die.”

“So it’s like magic that has been thought up for the sole reason of human combat practice, huh?”

“That’s it.”

He didn’t know who had invented that magic, but if it also protected people from demonic beasts, it would’ve held a greater significance.

“Ah...”

“What’s wrong?”

“Just... Just a small doubt, but does [Divine Protection of Valhalla] affect contract beasts?”

“It does. Basically, contract beasts are bound to the hexenritter, so they’re being counted as one person.”

“I see... What a relief...”

“Ara? Since you’ve been insisting so much that you’re human, should you really be relieved by that?”

“I-It’s not like that!”

When Hayate got angry and denied, Lela immediately rebuked him:

“I’m not done with the explanation yet. Be quiet.”

Her voice was calm, but it had a strange impact, and Hayate ducked his head.

“Before long it’ll already be time for the midterms. Once the tests are over, the intra-school rankings for the first-years will be announced as well. Each of you should get into it.”

“””””YES, MA’AM!”””””

“Well then, begin the warm-up. The mock battles will start in 15 minutes. Which pairs in which ring will be decided here, but everyone may choose their partner.”

Lela signalled to break up and the formation of teams and stretching began.

“Hey, come here and help me stretching, would you?”

“Yeah, yeah...”

Hayate went to the mock battle stretch corner and helped Sherry warm up.

“How many of those mock battles are there?”

“Two matches per pair.”

“Two matches? Can’t it end in a draw then?”

“Those are practice rules. Also, mock battles are about fighting until the end, so it’s not really a problem even if it ends in a draw. Even if not injured, you’d stack fatigue and there’d be a lack of concentration, too.”

“Heehh.”

With that, Hayate remembered *that* thing.

“That reminds me, how do hexenritter even fight?”

“Ara? Haven’t I told you, I wonder?”

“I’ve heard that contract beasts are fighting support and so on, but we stopped with the contract beast’s abilities.”

“That’s——”

When Sherry was about to continue yesterday’s talk, the voice of a third person forced its way through from the sidelines.

“Sherry Scharlachrot-san. Would you care to form a pair with me?”

The person who had raised her voice was the impressive Victoria, her golden hair in ringlets as always.

“Victoria-san. How unusual of you to call me.”

“Ara, there was a lonely person standing in the corner, so my humble self deliberately offered myself.”

“I greatly and honestly admire your needless concerns. But surely someone like Victoria-san wouldn’t want me as her opponent.”

“So you don’t *want* me to kindly offer my participation?”

Sparks scattered between them and cold sweat started running down on Hayate’s forehead.

...What’s with the climate in here...

“H-Hey...”

“HIII! Don’t touch me!”

When he wanted to suggest to do something about the air in this place, she got extremely frightened.

Although she’d been cleared of the ‘getting touched by men gets you pregnant’-misunderstanding, she seemed to even be unable to handle men now. Though, the person in question got embarrassed by her fear of men herself and while blushing, she cleared her throat with a cough to try and gloss over her reaction.

“A-Anyway. I’ll repay the debt from yesterday! Have a match with me!”

“...It pains me greatly but I must decline. Today, I only intend to observe.”

Sherry averted her gaze as if dodging Victoria’s fingertip and left the place while pretending not to see her counterpart that was shivering from anger.

“You’re getting cold feet?!”

“I just don’t feel like playing with you.”

“—!”

Victoria frowned.

Sherry was about to leave her like that.

However—

“As expected from the line of *traitors*. Your kind takes pride in running away, doesn’t it?!”

—Upon hearing those words, Sherry stopped and turned to face her.

“...Victoria. Victoria Verde. I couldn’t hear you too well. Could you repeat what you just said?”

Had she regaining her composure replying like that or had it just been too late to back down? In any case, Victoria repeated her words once more:

“I’ll say it however many times you ask. Sherry. Sherry Scharlachrot. Daughter of *traitors*; disgrace to nobility. Your family’s forte to flee under enemy fire has been passed down from generation to generation, has it not?”

GLARE—

The look in Sherry’s eyes changed.

Rage floated within it.

“It’s a fact that my family’s in ruins… If you want to tease me about that so badly, then I could just overlook it, but I cannot let that condescending slander pass…! Fine, I’ll go along with your provocations. I’ll ensure that you’ll never insult my family with that impudent talk of yours again!”

“That’s my line! I’ll carve the sight of a genuine hexenritter’s true abilities into you!”

Victoria snorted, turned her back on Sherry, and left.

“W-Wait a sec. Is that really alright?”

While he hadn’t intervened in their conversation up to now, Hayate finally asked.

It goes without saying that he’d have to fight in a mock battle as well.

However, Hayate was just an ordinary human. And on top of that, Victoria’s contract beast was a winged serpent. He had been told that contract beasts were supposed to support hexenritter, so he thought that there’d be a sure gap in fighting power here.

“Well, her contract beast *is* considerably strong. It’s some kind of lindworm or linddrake variety. It can’t pick up people, but it can fly in the air. And the force it exerts when coiling around someone is enough to crush an ox to death, you know?”

He’d already had a hunch that they stood no chance.

How was an unarmed human supposed to fight a serpent that could kill an ox?

“There’s no need to worry——”

Even if you say that... Hayate thought, but Sherry continued with a composed expression.

“——It’ll be fine if you just stay quiet and watch from the sidelines.”

Victoria Verde.

He’d been told that her family served the Caeruleus House which was among the big four Families, and the current head held power rivalling them. Victoria was the daughter of said head.

She, too, had inherited the abilities of her parents, in the same way like her older sister, and was strongly rumored to place within the top 50 of the school intern rankings which would be published after the midterms.

The opponent’s profile, that he was told by Sherry before the match began, had a lot of points that made him to despair.

“So, the mock battle Verde and Scharlachrot will begin now. The match ends when either of you faint or give up.”

Lela, the referee, explained the simple rules of the mock battle.

“Well then, both parties. Position yourselves at the opposite edges of the ring.”

“”...””

After exchanging a silent glance, Sherry and Victoria did as they were told and moved to the edges of the ring.

“Lindis.”

Victoria called upon her lindworm. The serpent, which had been coiled around her body, descended to the ground and prepared for battle. Although small wings sprouted out of its back, it seemed incapable of permanent flight.

The opponent was perfectly motivated—— And on the other side Hayate had still been unable to steel his resolve.

This was thanks to his instinctual fear of fighting.

“Hey, oi... What should I do?”

“I already told you not to worry about it, right? Just don’t move from now on.”

Sherry said to remind him of what she had already said before the match.

When he was close to just not caring anymore, Lela swung her upraised hand down.

“——BEGIN!”

“Let’s test you first! Lindis!”

Concurrently with the start signal, Victoria sent her contract beast ahead and broke into a run herself.

“Uo—! The snake’s so fast—!”

Although the serpent was still far from him, Hayate was perturbed by the rapidly approaching opponent.

However, Sherry calmly began chanting.

“O those who dance in the wind, bestow thy blessing unto me which doth releases my link with the earth——
[HIMMELSSCHRITT]!”

Instantly, her feet floated off the mithril ground.

Becoming capable of moving in the air, she took a big leap to the left.

“Come chase me, Lindis!”

“SHAA——!”

Hitting the ground with its body, the lindworm finally used its wings to take flight, chasing hot on Sherry’s heels. Victoria gave orders while following behind closely.

“...!”

Should I chase after her too? But I’d probably just burden her...!

——’Just don’t move from now on.’

Hayate recalled her words and hesitated.

“O those who slumber in the cold of the mausoleum, bestow thy freezing breath onto my fingertips——”

Sherry turned her body in mid air and pointed her white fingertip at the approaching serpent.

“——[FREEZING]!”

crackcrackcrack—— The cold wave that was released from Sherry’s fingertip froze the humid air and covered both eyes of the fast-approaching beast.

“DSCHAAAAAA!”

“Lindis?!”

Panicking, Victoria rushed below her partner, which was crying from the sudden pain.

“How dare you!”

“Don’t you think that it’s reckless to just send your contract beast ahead alone?”

Sherry nonchalantly replied to the enraged Victoria.

But this just fueled her opponent’s anger further.

“I’m not going to let you get away anymore!”

“You sure love your idle talk. People who slumber in the cold of the mausoleum——”

“Ku——!”

Sherry started to chant her magic again and Victoria lept back in a fluster – together with her contract beast.

Maybe because Victoria had left the effective range, Sherry stopped chanting.

“Your way of using magic with your finger is rather sly, isn’t it?!”

“Unfortunately, while the rest of you have been training your hexenritter powers, I’ve been in intensive training to raise the accuracy of my magic. That was all I had.”

“...Ha! With that, you’re indeed completely like a commoner, aren’t you! You’re lacking the confidence to acquire a [Wand], right?”

“...”

Sherry didn’t reply.

[Wand]...?

Hayate mentally inclined his head upon hearing an unknown word.

“You’re a lowly witch that can’t become a knight after all. It was reckless of you to challenge someone like me!”

“Though it was you who provoked me to do that earlier, wasn’t it?”

“Y-You’re annoying! Anyway, we’ve been fooling around long enough!”

Victoria stretched out her hands after glaring at Sherry sternly.

“Cast! ——[TAILWORM]!”

Simultaneously with Victoria’s ringing scream, the contract mark on her contract beast’s forehead shone.

In the next instant, a whip of the same color as the lindworm's scales appeared in her hand.

That has to be that so-called [Wand], Hayate made an educated guess.

So a contract beast's ability is to produce weapons for the hexenritter? Which reminds me, Sherry was in the middle of explaining that when she said something like, 'They give form to the magic that they harvest from people in their bodies', and so on...

In other words, those [Wand]s are the things that contract beasts produce inside their bodies using the magical power of people?

They exchanged vows with contract beasts and were able to cast [Wand]s or something—— That was all he knew about hexenritter and witches. Victoria had accused Sherry to be among the witches who couldn't become knights. She had made fun of her for not being able to call those [Wand]s.

“Tzk—!”

With a small click of her tongue, this time it was Sherry who took her distance from Victoria.

“I won't let you get away!”

Victoria swung the [Tailworm]—— and the whip extended.

“Uu—!”

Extending over a great length, the whip's tip hit Sherry's flank, causing her to grimace in pain.

Sherry applied the [Himmelsschritt] magic again and tried for a huge retreat, but the opponent's whip expanded ceaselessly and attacked her again.

“There's no escaping from my [Tailworm], you know!”

In accordance with Victoria's voice, the whip lengthened yet again. With that, no matter how much she distanced herself, she couldn't escape.

That was a [Wand]...!

A weapon far from common sense.

And Victoria, who could reach as far as the eye could see, was able to attack the considerably more distant Hayate at any time as well.

Oi, oi! With this there's no place to run, is there?! What am I supposed to do then?!

However, there was no need to worry where he should run to or what the right thing to do was——

“Now, what are you going to do, Sherry Scharlachrot?!”

“Ku—!”

Victoria kept aiming for Sherry; she didn't attack Hayate at all.

“Why... doesn't she attack me...?”

If it's with that [Wand], she could just attack me in passing... but although she could easily turn me into a helpless mess...

After a bit of thinking, he realized the answer.

The match could be settled by the opponent giving up.

In other words, since Hayate was considered a contract beast, his condition didn't affect the outcome. Not to forget Sherry's choice to fight alone, even if he was brought down while fighting and Sherry alone remained, the fight wouldn't end... Considering that, she had practically no reason to attack him.

He realized why Sherry had told him to not move numerous times before the match had started.

If he kept quiet, nothing would be done to him.

That's why doing nothing had been essential.

Did that girl intend to fight alone from the start...?!

“HYAAA!”

The [Tailworm] struck Sherry's chest and beat her into the ground.

“AH—!”

She raised her voice in anguish as her clothes got torn.

The [Divine Protection of Valhalla] kept warriors from dying and getting wounded, but he had heard that it was different for the pain they received. That's why there was that defeat condition which stated the loss by fainting from damage.

“I'll end it with this!”

Victoria attacked the collapsed Sherry again.

Maybe because she didn't have the concentration anymore or because her [Himmelsschritt] magic had worn off, she curled up on the ground and took the blows without even trying to escape.

Seeing that scene—— CLACK—— a switch flipped inside Hayate.

“...!”

Before he knew it, he had broken out into a run.

...To save that girl over there who had been fighting alone.

“Come on, how long will you be able to bear it, I wonder...
That's... ara?”

Victoria subconsciously stopped her hands after seeing Hayate rushing into the midst of battle as he had been playing the scarecrow up until now.

“Sherry!”

Hayate helped Sherry up, who was motionlessly lying in a hole.

Her eyes opened faintly.

“...What now, are you taking advantage of the situation to call me by name?”

“I've been calling you that from the start, you know...”

However, all he had needed to feel relieved was to hear that same wicked tongue as ever.

“Wait... That incompetent man couldn’t possibly think he’d be a hindrance to me, could he?”

Victoria’s displeased voice came from behind.

“...Why did you come?”

Sherry’s words implied that if he had listened obediently, she wouldn’t have eyed him.

But Hayate opened up another matter, ignoring that question.

“Oi, make a [Wand] appear from my contract mark and use it. I don’t get it too well, but... if you’re a hexenritter, you can do that, right?”

The contract mark on Hayate’s right hand.

He didn’t know by himself how to produce a [Wand], but if it was Sherry, the professional, then it should be possible, shouldn’t it? That was both – his opinion and question.

At the same time it was a decision to fight on her side.

However...

“...It’s impossible.”

“Why? As long as you try, it’s not, right? So...”

“Even without trying I know how it’d play out already. Because you and I aren’t tied together by a thread.”

“...Huh?”

“I told you that hexenritter and contract beast are bound by a thread that serves as a medium for sharing magical power, haven’t I? This thread also transmits the feelings of the contract beast to the master on occasion.”

The thread tied their hearts together. For that reason it could fall into a counter-current and transmit them to the hexenritter, when the contract beast felt strong emotions.

“Strong emotions... So, like, when you did things like changing in front of me?”

“...That was embarrassing...”

It had probably been an attempt to determine whether they shared a proper bond by greatly shaking Hayate’s emotions... It was a way to achieve that.

“Then you’re saying that you’re also provoking me on purpose with that wicked tongue of yours...?”

“That’s au naturel.”

“Au naturel?”

“Anyway, even if we’ve only spent a day together, that’s already enough for me to tell. There’s no thread between you and I. You’re not my manservant——”

After that, Sherry spoke what Hayate had tried to convince her of numerous times already.

“——You’re an ordinary human.”

“...”

In spite of his humanity finally being approved by her, Hayate wasn't happy at all.

... Which reminds me... Yeah, it was like that, huh...

Hadn't the girl in front of his eyes kept calling him 'manservant' to caution herself of the whole contract beast matter?

However, to the chairman and teachers, rather than calling him 'manservant', she had introduced Hayate as her 'contract beast'... Only once had her tongue slipped. Only once. She hadn't thought of him as a contract beast even for a second.

“So, when you found out that I'm not your contract beast, why didn't you drive me out of the dorm...?!”

That obvious question came to Hayate's mind, then Sherry's words from the previous day crossed his mind.

'Shut up already. At any rate, it's not like you have anywhere to go, so just be obedient and listen to what I'm saying.'

“...So it was like that?”

He'd been unaware of that point at that time, but it was truly as she had said. Hayate with his memory loss had neither a goal to chase, nor a place to return to, or a partner to rely on. If he had been thrown out of the dorm in that kind of situation, what would've happened? It didn't need much thought, he'd surely have suffered miserably.

That's why Sherry hadn't driven him out.

Yeah, geez... If it wasn't for her wicked tongue and if she talked a bit differently, I'd have realized it a lot sooner.

“...”

Hayate stood up and faced Victoria.

As if protecting Sherry behind him.

“What do you think you can achieve by that? You can't possible want to protect her, can you?”

“What if?”

“Ohohoho! A man protecting a woman, I've never heard of such a ridiculous thing!”

Victoria burst out in laughter from seeing something so, in her eyes, comical.

In this world – on this continent – *women* protected *men*.

But that kind of thing—— didn't matter to the memory-less Hayate.

“I'm Sherry's contract beast. So it's alright for me to protect her, isn't it?”

“You must be a real fool, huh? How about this? If you give yourself up to me——”

“You're annoying, ringlets girl. You and your funny hairstyle.”

“What was that?!”

Being interrupted, the edges of Victoria's mouth twitched.

“This...!”

“_____!”

Before the enraged girl could say more, Hayate got bold and began to run.

He intended to close in to the best of his ability. The [Tailworm]’s range covered the entirety of the ring. If they were apart, his chance of success was zero. There was no way but to charge preemptively.

However...

“D-DON’T COME NEAR ME! LINDIS!”

“...?!”

“SHAA——!”

Before he knew it, the revived serpent had commenced a surprise attack from underfoot. As he had was trying for a surprise attack himself, he was easily caught by and then held down.

“UU, GAAAAAA!”

Hayate’s body scream from the increasing force, that could even crush an ox.

His vision flashed due to excess pain. His head, *THROBTHROB*, seemed to break and, *CRUSHCRACK* sounds came here and there from his body.

One second felt like a trillion, the seemingly endless pain——

“STOP ALREADY! IT’S MY LOSS!”

——was ended by her scream.

The lindworm’s pressure easened up, but Hayate, unable to stand at all, collapsed onto the mithril ground with that.

“Winner, Verde.”

Ahh...

With Lela’s voice, Hayate understood at last.

Sherry had given up.

There were two battles per match in total and a ten minute interval between battles. Hayate had his aching body lain down after borrowing Sherry’s shoulder to leave the ring. She placed his head on her lap.

However, right now he didn’t have the composure to enjoy that feeling—— Even now, he was tormented by extreme regret rather than the pain throughout his body.

He had forced Sherry to give up... She had got punished so many, many times, and yet she hadn’t given up once! But nevertheless, even if it was to save someone like him, she hadn’t hesitated for a mere second.

“Why?”

“...Hm?”

When she removed her arm which hid her sorrowful eyes, Sherry looked down to peer into Hayate’s.

“Why... did you try to fight? You’re just a human, right? Men can’t use magic. On the contrary, even your memory loss... is probably my fault... and yet, why did you try to fight Victoria? You didn’t have one reason to fight, did you...?”

Hayate wasn’t a fighting maniac. He was an ordinary human – afraid of pain.

And ordinary humans need a reason to fight.

For example... Yes, something like Sherry’s past that he had heard from Aria this morning——



——In the morning, Aria shared the story of Sherry’s past with Hayate in the shadow of the school building.

“In this country there are nobles who are called the big four, they’re holding powers that are unrivaled even among royal families. Sherry-kun was a daughter of the Scharlachrot Family, one of those big four.”

Was. Past tense. A style to address things that were no longer.

“Her mother, the former head of the family – famed as the ‘Red Moon Knight’, was strong. One of the strongest hexenritter on the continent. She was loved by the feudal lords and even fiefs; it seems like Sherry-kun had a happy childhood with her. But one day the Scharlachrot territory was attacked by a large horde of demonic beasts. It’s not unusual for them to appear out of nowhere in one’s territory, but...”

“Demonic beasts keep appearing all of a sudden, because—— no one knows where they are born or where they come from, or so I’ve been told.”

“Those new species of demonic beasts were surprisingly strong. I’ve only heard rumors, but stuff like one-eyed giants and so on... Well, when the ‘Red Moon Knight’ lead the chivalric order, they should’ve been able to completely get rid of them no matter what—— However, the moment the new species appeared, the ‘Red Moon Knight’ disappeared all of a sudden and no one knew where she had disappeared to. Without the head to command the chivalric order, the Scharlachrot Family fell into chaos. At that time, Sherry-kun’s grandmother – the ‘Blue Moon Knight’ – was still in good health, but in her already advanced age she couldn’t command an army on the scene. Of course neither could the still little Sherry-kun.”

In the end, the large demonic beast horde got annihilated by the hands of a chivalric order that was under the direct command of the Queen.

However, when the reinforcements finally arrived, the Scharlachrot Family had already suffered many casualties among the fiefs.

“The fiefs were tolerating the various privileges and favorable treatments of the nobles, because hexenritter hold the power to protect country and people from demonic beasts. But they thought the nobles had forsaken them when push came to shove, so in the blink of an eye their hearts grew distant and the country almost... Their power was also the reason why the Queen Family hadn’t been able to take a stern attitude against the Scharlachrot Family before. But then they seized most of their property and the peerage fell to the lowest rank.”

As there were more and more reparation payments towards the fiefs due and the Scharlachrot Family had already gotten poor at this point, they collapsed. However, even when Sherry had fallen to the lowest rank, it was arranged that her peerage and family name remained; the Queen’s Family had shown kindness in regards to one of the four big nobles that had served continuously since the founding of the Starfarm Kingdom.

After that, Sherry and the remains of her Family had been trotted out to unknown lands together...

“First, her father disappeared when he wasn’t able to bear the blame and discrimination. Sherry-kun lived together with her grandmother, but I heard that two years ago her grandmother died too. After that, as you probably expect, she didn’t know what to do. But this year she came knocking at the gates of Diaspell Royal Academy.”

Until now, Hayate had kept silent and was listening to Aria the whole time.

But he still didn’t understand it. Why had Sherry come to Diaspell Royal Academy and for what reason was she trying to become the strongest hexenritter?

When he asked Aria once more, she showed a bit of a worried expression.

“All I can do is guessing from here on... but there’s one thing that’d come to mind. Since she’s not just trying to become an ordinary but the strongest hexenritter, then it should be——”



“——The Eighth Big Walpurgis Night. A big fighting tournament that decides who’s the strongest hexenritter. It’s carried out by the eight strongest Families across the whole Frühling continent. The winner of that tournament is handed the literal title of the continent’s strongest.”

As Hayate had suddenly started talking about that kind of thing, Sherry stared at him with a puzzled expression.

“You’ve lost your memories, so why would you know about the Walpurgis Night?”

“I asked Aria this morning... and also about the story of the Glanzweisen peerage.”

Glanzweisen—— An honor peerage of the Starfarm Continent given to the winner of the Eighth Big Walpurgis Night. It was different from the usual peerage that was bestowed to each Family. The Glanzweisen was only granted to a single person and couldn’t be inherited. A status equal to a marquis.

“All nations on the continent closed a peace treaty. Since all the defense funds are being used to entertain countermeasures against the demonic beasts that keep appearing in each country’s territory, there’s no room for war between nations anyway. That’s why there’s the Eighth Big Walpurgis Night – a fighting tournament. BBut I find it difficult that it’s some kind of stand-in for war between those countries. A victory in this tournament’s significant. So the Starfarm Continent grants the honor peerage of Glanzweisen to the winner, plus an enormous amount of prize money on top of that...”

“That might be true, but where lies the problem?”

Sherry intentionally inclined her head to play dumb.

“You’re trying to become the strongest hexenritter to return triumphantly to the Starfarm Continent, gain the title of Glanzweisen, and restore the name of the Scharlachrot Family.”

“...Well, isn’t this some fine reasoning? Did Aria-san get to this conclusion?”

“Yeah, so far.”

“So far?”

Sherry narrowed her eyes upon hearing Hayate and displayed an apprehensive expression.

Her manner was different from her prior played ignorance... She likely didn’t want anyone to guess her real goal.

She even thought that she was deceiving someone by calling her companion contract beast... She wanted to be despised and seen as an unsightly living being——

“——Isn’t that all for the sake to make your parents come home?”

“_____”

Sherry didn’t raise her voice, she silently opened her eyes wide. Her expression told Hayate that he had been on the mark.

It wasn’t just to carry the title of the continent’s strongest or for the reputed peerage. Nor was it for the enormous sum of money. Considering that, it couldn’t be for the recovery of her once lost homelands either.

“If I can restore our honor, former residence, and also revive the Scharlachrot Family... Then my parents must return. Isn’t that what you’re thinking?”

Seeing Sherry’s expression, he had confidence in what he was saying, but... without warning, her expression went flat and her voice grew cold and distant.

“That’s what a child would wish for... The incident with my mother is something inexcusable for a noble. Do you think the daughter of such a person would be allowed to wish for the return of ordinary happiness? The fiefs died because of my mother... What about their families? Our Eminence, the Queen? The other nobles?”

Aria, too, had pointed out several things herself.

For example, even if Sherry carried the title of the continent’s strongest to the Starfarm kingdom, it wouldn’t ease the fiefs’ grudge held against her mother.

That’s why Aria had guessed that Sherry merely wanted to recover her Family’s honor.

So would be the view of an adult from a calm and realistic standpoint.

But.

“Aren’t you a child?”

“...”

“I don’t think that it’s strange for a child to want to be with their parents. Even someone like me with no memories knows that much.”

He could recall that he had parents, but neither could he remember their faces nor their names. It was the same for where and how he had lived with his family, and how he had been raised.

Nevertheless, he felt that he really wanted to meet them.

Even if he had no memories, his heart desired it. It was that kind of feeling.

Even if there was neither a reason nor a motive behind it—— The answer that had appeared in his heart couldn’t be false.

“You asked me for my motive when I tried to fight earlier... It’s because I want to protect your dream – your dream to reunite with your family.”

“...Is that so... But I’ll ask again—— Why? I’ll become a hexenritter, someone who crushes the lives of contract beasts, kick around other hexenritter, even ignore the feelings of the fiefs that hold a grudge against my mother, and want to try and fulfill my dream, which won’t be allowed by anybody. Why would you want to protect that selfish dream of my unsightly... unsightly, unsightly, *unsightly* self?”

Using the lives of contract beasts, ignoring other people’s feelings, and granting herself the wish of meeting her own mother again – Sherry had indeed put it in an unsightly way.

She thought that if her dream was lacking nobility, then it'd be alright to ignore lives and feelings.

But still... she was set to make it happen. That dream. She was set to meet her own mother once more. That's why she had come to Diaspell Royal Academy. Even if she had to bear the cold stares of her peers. She hadn't been able to obtain a contract beast... However, without giving up she had carried out the summoning ritual by herself.

As the result, Hayate had been summoned... She must've been disappointed for sure. She had wanted to have the power to fulfill her dream. And yet... And yet, without showing even a shred of her disappointment, she had saved someone like him who didn't have anywhere to go. That might be the most obvious to do as a person, but how many people out there would've done that so-called obvious thing in her situation?

A direct, proud, and gentle girl like this, Hayate was——

“——I thought I wanted to protect it, so I did. I wanted to become your ally. That's all.”

She had been, to say the least, abused by other people as if it wasn't a big deal and it didn't seem to Hayate as if her existence was something that *had* to be tormented. So had been his thinking, so he wanted to protect her.

That moment, Hayate's heart was compelled by a driving force, just from that desire alone.

Following their conversation, Lela signalled the end of the break.

“Both parties, enter the ring.”

“Aaahh... damn it, is it time already?”

Cursing, Hayate stood up. The damage he had received from the lindworm's grip had healed considerably, but a strange out-of-place feeling remained.

“You still want to fight?”

Sherry asked after lining up next to Hayate inside the white lines.

“Well, you can't bring something like a [Wand] out of me and I find myself not particularly useful, but... I should at least be able to serve as a meat shield or decoy or something...”

“That's not true.”

“Hm?”

Hayate stared at the girl with a question mark floating above his head after his reasoning had been interrupted. And almost instantly, Victoria sneered from the other side of the ring and raised her voice:

“You still intend to carry on? I wonder, how about you give up *before* we start this time?”

The first matching having ended in almost absolute victory, Victoria exuded confidence from every pore of her body as she was talking.

“——BEGIN!”

Lela signaled the begin of the second mock battle round.

But Sherry showed no reaction at all to Victoria's provocations nor to the start signal.

Her ruby-like eyes were fixated on Hayate.

"Do you still feel like fighting for my sake? If you still want to become my ally... I think there's a way to win."

"_____"

She displayed a gaze that wouldn't forgive a lie.

Hayate straightened his posture, of which only his head had been turned to her, and stared right back at Sherry from in front of her. She also turned into his direction and they both only looked into each others eyes.

"Yeah."

A short reply. He nodded.

"That so?"

Sherry's reply, too, only consisted of this.

And in the next moment—— her lips covered his.

"Nn? Nnn?!"

W-Why would you suddenly... ?!

Hayate, unable to move about, heard the sound of air being cut. It was probably the sound of the approaching [Tailworm]. ‘If I can’t protect her——’ When this thought crossed his mind, the transformation took place.

ROAR! From within Hayate and Sherry’s hearts a strong, hot wind arose and pelted. The [Tailworm] was forced back by the wind and couldn’t reach both of them.

“W-What’s that?!”

“Nn, nnnn—!”

While Hayate was surprised at the unusual phenomenon, a flirtatious voice leaked out of Sherry’s mouth.

Light brimmed over from her chest where her uniform had been torn and a familiar sword crest emerged.

“It’s just like the thing on my right hand... UWA—?!”

When Hayate raised his right hand to be sure, both of their crests began emitting light in concert.

What now?! Something... seems to be flowing into my head...

He felt a strange sensation.

It spread throughout the contract mark and somehow like a big wave—— ‘knowledge’ flowed into him.

He suddenly understood what he was meant do.

Hayate placed his right hand on Sherry’s chest as if he was drawn to it.

Both contract marks were separated by a paper's margin and overlapped each other.

“CREATION!”

Hayate released the words that had flowed into his head.

Instantly, a mass so hot that it couldn't be compared to the hot wind until just now was forced into his right hand—— he took the handle, and pulled it out in one go.

“Aaah...!”

Sherry's seductive voice only reached Hayate's ears near her.

The moment he grasped it, she was drained of her strength and couldn't stand anymore, so Hayate supported her with his left arm and embraced her.

After seeing the thing he had pulled out from inside her, the students surrounding the ring made a stir.

“Eh? That's——”

“Impossible... It can't be!”

Their gazes were fixated on Hayate's right hand—— It was occupied by the deep crimson sword that he held.

“That's... a [Wand]?”

Sherry, whose face had blushed in Hayate's arms, also muttered in surprise.

“That's not it.”

“Eh?”

“This thing is no [Wand]—— it’s a [Seele].”

A [Seele] was a paranormal weapon that surpassed the [Wand]s of hexenritter. The knowledge that had flowed into him just now had also covered the usage of this new weapon.

He could immediately handle it like his own hands and feet.

“W-What’s happening...?”

Victoria stood baffled at the sudden transformation.

Noticing the defenceless figure of his opponent, Hayate tightly grasped the sword’s handle and parted it from Sherry’s body.

“Please wait a second. I’ll end this in an instant.”

Hayate ran off without even waiting for a reply.

An astonishing amount of power flowed through the sword in his hands. The physical ability of an ordinary human like Hayate had improved tremendously.

He was approaching towards his opponent like the swift wind of a fast runner.

“Wha—?! D-Don’t come here!”

Seeing the fast-approaching Hayate, Victoria swung [Tailworm] in a fluster.

Even if the trajectory would exceed the speed of sound, the current him could easily seize it.

“YOU NUISANCE—!”

While releasing a loud scream, the attacking whip was parted into two.

Take the [Tailworm] [Wand] as an example. Despite of being shaped like a whip, it was as sturdy as steel. However, the [Seele] in his hands easily cut it up.

The trace following the burning-red edge of the sword danced down in sparks.

The violence of that sword technique equalled a raging fire.

“L-Lindis!”

“SHAA——!”

Desperate to buy time, Victoria sent her own contract beast towards Hayate.

Assuming the contract beast's absolute obedience to their hexenritter—— it's current behavior wasn't necessarily what the lindworm desired itself.

Perhaps it wanted to run away. When he thought that, his chest felt a bit tight, but if the serpent stood in his way, he could do nothing but fight it.

“BLAZE!”

When Hayate shouted, [Seele] grew red hot and a blazing vortex broke out of the red edge.

“ZAAAAA?!”

The serpent's whole body got coiled in flames. It screamed and wriggled on the mithril ground.

From under his armpit, Hayate gazed at his opponent and prepared his flame sword.

“T-This—!”

It had been Victoria's last vain struggle.

Her face was warped as if she had witnessed a nightmare.

Drawing near towards the opponent like a swift wind, he made sure to knock down all enemy assaults and concentrated his attacks on her like a raging fire. In the blink of an eye he had covered the space between them.

It certainly was like a nightmare seeing Hayate draw near like that.

“oooooooooooooooh!”

Hayate swung down his fire sword.

The edge slashed at the wrist of her hand that held [Tailworm]. Although thanks to the [Divine Blessing of Valhalla] bodies couldn't be injured, the pain she felt forced her to drop the whip.

He turned over to the blunt side of the edge and thrusted accurately at the nape of her neck.

“This can't... I...!”

Victoria murmured while staring at the sword that had been thrusted at her.

Hayate deliberately negated the fire that had assaulted the lindworm. He could manipulate the [Seele's] fire at will, which also included the temperature.

In the end, the lindworm fainted after a sole shriek due to damage suffered. With her contract beast losing consciousness, the dropped [Tailworm] also dissolved into particles of magical power. With that, Victoria wouldn't be able to summon it again until her contract beast woke up.

The match had been a done deal in anyone's eyes, but Victoria still complained about something as if she couldn't believe it.

“I am... Victoria Verde... descendant of the great Verde Family... Losing against the likes of a man...”

“...I can't understand what you're trying to say, but you know...”

Hayate put strength into gripping the sword in his hands.

“Want to go on?”

“——Tzk.”

Victoria bit her lips in frustration...

“...It's... my loss...”

Seemingly still not wanting to accept it, she gave up with a small voice.

“Winner, Scharlachrot.”

Lela calmly announced the conclusion.

A man had suddenly picked up a [Seele]—— the students and teachers recognised it as [Wand], however—— and a contract beast had even overpowered a hexenritter, but the black-clothed teacher had kept calm until the end. Everyone else in the mock battle area kept calling the thing in front of their eyes abnormal, or were shocked, or even went crazy.

However, Hayate didn’t care about the commotion around him.

He went back along the same straight line he had run across on earlier and stood in front of Sherry.

...He tried to say something smart, but he couldn’t think of anything at all.

“What a strange face you’re making. You just tried to say something cool, didn’t you?”

“UGU—!”

She had seen through his intentions.

No, but... And here I thought the real me just now had been pretty cool... I see, I just can’t show off, huh...

Sherry spoke a few words to the downhearted Hayate.

“Even if you can’t decorate it with words, you were plenty cool just now.”

“Th...”

Being told that so directly, Hayate now got embarrassed.

To make matters worse, when he looked in her direction, another ‘embarrassing factor’ rose up to his head...

“H-Hey...”

“What is it?”

“Ah... That’s... Why did you kiss me earlier?”

With his head bright red, Hayate asked the question that had been on his mind all the time.

Unlike him, without a single change in her countenance, Sherry answered his question.

“I wonder whether I should call it a reward prepayment for the contract...”

“Reward?”

Certainly, for a guy to be kissed by such a beautiful girl, it was close to a reward...

“You’d fight for my sake, you said that, right?”

“Y-Yeah.”

“Right—— In that case, Hayate...”

Huh... did she just... call me by my name...?

When he was surprised by the fact that Sherry had called him by his name for the first time ever, she thrusted her graceful finger in front of his eyes—— and then declared with a dignified voice:

“From today on, you’ll become my manservant. But on the other hand, I will become your slave.”

Chapter 3: Let's Buy a Collar

Several days had passed since the mock battle with Victoria.

On a holiday in Diaspell Royal Academy. Even with a lot time having passed since sunrise, Hayate kept dozing on the floor, wrapped in a blanket.

“Nnn~, munya-munya...”

He had recovered from the fatigue of the mock battle a long time ago, but the battle had only been one part of the lesson. One time block among several of a day, and once he had been over with that one part, the academy life was long from over. On top of that, he also had to help with Sherry’s part time job after school, and one way or the other, Hayate’s life had turned into a tight schedule daily.

Today, the academy had a holiday, and on top of that, she hadn’t been assigned a working shift either.

When Hayate kept sleeping on the only day that he could indulge in indolence—— he suddenly got trampled on his stomach pit.

“Won’t you get up already, you manservant...”

“Gufu—?!”

Leaking a muffled scream, Hayate was literally wide awake in not even a second.

Waking someone up in such an awful way first thing in the morning... Well, that was expected from Sherry. She was penetrating a critical spot with her long legs. The angle was good enough to even see her panties, but he couldn't thanks to the hem of the skirt perfectly guarding the contents. Was it all calculated?

Well, rather than whether her panties could or could not be seen, being disturbed from his slumber was more unforgivable.

“...I still haven’t had enough sleep.”

“I’ll trample on you, you know?”

“You already have.”

“I’ll step on you even more.”

“...Yeah, yeah. I’ll get up, I’ll get up!”

A girl that’s merciless first thing in the morning...

“...Morning.”

“Yes. Morning.”

He had intended to give off a tone that was somewhat filled with resentment, but because of Sherry’s composed expression he gave a greeting back.



When he stood up, stretched, and his half-asleep mind gradually woke up—— Hayate's gaze was naturally drawn to her lips for some reason.

“_____!”

He was reminded of their tenderness.

Recalling a sensation that he couldn't forget even after a few days had passed, his face burned in the early morning already.

Calm down, me...! Haven't I been hearing that it was just for the sake of the contract??

That time Sherry had kissed him, he heard that she put a book on 'Special Summoning Combinations' to use, in which was mentioned that, 'To perfect the contract, they had to overlap the lips'. That's why he was able to use [Seele] immediately after they had kissed.

But at the time she hadn't said that it was about the contract, but had called it 'reward'... He still hadn't asked what she meant.

“Hey, if you're up, hurry and get dressed!”

Saying that, Sherry had already changed into her uniform.

“...Isn't it a day off from the academy?”

“We'll be going out, you know? Even on holidays students of the academy are obliged to wear the uniform.”

“You saying we're going somewhere?”

“That’s right.”

“Ooh!”

Normally, they’d be pending between the ‘Berry-in Café’ and the academy, but this was the first time that they’d go where they please. He got nervous all of a sudden.

“Wait.”

“Hm?”

“Aren’t you noticing anything when you look at me?”

“...?”

Being urged by her suggestive question, he strained his eyes to look if there was something about her that had changed and... noticing the ‘change’, he instinctively pinched his nose.

“T-That uniform...!”

With his whole face blushing, Hayate trembled and pointed at the daring opening in Sherry’s uniform.

Had she left the button open on purpose? No, it wasn’t that kind of story. It wasn’t anything like the slit in the chest area like her homeroom teacher Lela had. The upper part of her clothes that had somewhat covered her breasts had been completely removed, her white, round, and standing out ‘northern hemisphere’ was completely exposed.

“I asked the chairman to remodel the uniform, you know? It looks good, right?”

“W-What’s with the underwear?!”

“Today’s panties have black lace.”

“I meant the top!”

“I’m wearing a corset.”

Sherry pressed her crossed arms tightly and lifted up her breasts. Thereupon, her breasts seemed ready to spill out of her clothes any time, and Hayate grew increasingly nervous.

“When I do this, the contract mark is easy to see, right?
Look...”

In her cleavage was—— Now he understood, the sword crest certainly was visible. It was well visible, and if push came to shove, it’d probably be easy to overlap with Hayate’s right hand. That’s why...

“Isn’t that embarrassing?”

“I’m not showing it to anyone but you. Plus, it’s necessary anyway. Your [Wand]... No, it was a [Seele], no? To draw it out, the contract marks on your right hand and on my chest have to cover each other, right?”

It was something that he knew because of the knowledge that had flown into him at the time he drew out the [Seele] during the mock battle.

Originally, [Wand]s were weapons that were created inside the bodies of contract beasts by the magical power that the hexenritter distributed through the thread. If the bond between hexenritter and contract beast was good enough, the hexenritter could bring the [Wand] forth to their hand by a single [Cast] yell, even if they were a bit apart.

On the other hand, when Hayate drew out [Seele], both contract marks had to overlap.

He didn't know the detailed theory behind it, as merely a 'That's the way it is' -knowledge had flown into him. However, the academy's opinion – or namely – Lela's opinion was:

"Between Hayate and Sherry, there is no magical power thread which normally ties together hexenritter and contract beast. Therefore, by overlapping both marks, a special circle is created and the weapon can be taken out directly – that's what I consider it to be."

Furthermore, the black-clothed teacher added this:

"Since the olden days they say that on the occasion when a hexenritter lets the magical power spread throughout the thread and transfers it to the contract beast, a considerable loss occurs on the way. The sword that that person used was probably so powerful, because he had taken it out directly from Scharlachrot without transferring anything over a thread."

This story had spread throughout the academy like wildfire, and Hayate and Sherry had once again drawn attention in a different way.

That aside...

“...Is it really okay to remodel the uniform like that?”

“Originally, it was approved to tailor uniforms to match the [Wand]s’ characteristics. Well, without caring about that, everyone remodels it for fashion’s sake.”

“...”

“So? I’d like to hear your impression on it.”

Sherry inquired Hayate.

Of course she meant his impression on the new uniform.

But even if he was told that...

“Ah...”

“Ah?”

“Eh...”

“Eh?”

“.....I-It’s erotic.”

“...”

Remaining silent was the most painful thing right now. But he hadn’t been able to think of anything besides that!

Sherry unfolded her crossed arms.

“Well then, shall we head out now?”

“...Understood. So where are we going?”

Hayate, whose sleepiness had been completely blown away, casually asked.

He had been interested in going out from the start, but... in the meantime his energy had been thoroughly drained away by the little events that he had been caught in. He already had the feeling that anywhere would be fine.

“Let’s go and have a look at the first milestone to reach my dream.”



The academy city Avunir. A prospering place of trade, which played a central part regarding the Diaspell Royal Academy, and the biggest city after the royal capital Sunblest.

It had many shops that welcomed the sons and daughters of nobility as their guests and gave the impression that the whole town was a shining beacon of society.

Especially for Hayate it was the first time witnessing the liveliness during the daytime, as it had always been late when he arrived after classes finished. With the many stands and things that appeared, he got distracted left and right. All of the displeasure that he had been feeling before their departure, had been blown to oblivion.

In any case, the establishment Sherry brought him to was a somewhat mature-looking one. It was like a restaurant, but in contrast to the ‘Berry-in Café’ it also seemed to serve alcohol and the like. However, different from an ordinary bar, the tables and glasses which held the drinks gave off an impression of good taste all the way.

It was dim inside the bar, and the reason being that when one looked around, there wasn’t just one window. Instead, all the walls except for the one with the entrance had been filled out with something like glass. The glass wasn’t transparent, it felt like it was semi-transparent, and so it wasn’t possible to be seen from outside the establishment.

“What is this place? I take it isn’t just an ordinary bar...?”

“It’s also a bar, but in truth, it’s something else.”

After saying that, Sherry asked an employee for an open seat.

When it became apparent that Sherry was a student of Diaspell Royal Academy, the waiter went out of his way to get a new table and chairs from the other side of the establishment and seated them at a spot near the center.

Sherry asked the employee to pick drinks for two.

“By the way, when does the match begin?”

“Yes, it will commence at one o’clock.”

“Is that so? Thank you.”

After that, the waiter left smiling.

She gazed at the clock that was hung on the wall.

“It’ll be one o’clock in five minutes. Geez, we would’ve almost been too late because of this useless manservant.”

“Say, what match is this?”

It appeared that that was the reason she had taken Hayate to this establishment.

“You’ll understand in a bit. Wait quietly until our drinks arrive. Or keep looking at me.”

“Come again?”

“I for one will be looking at you.”

Unintentionally, he had been about to respond with ‘What the heck’, but before he knew it, he had shut his mouth as Sherry really fixated her gaze at him.

Again... Recently, it looks like she’s taking on that attitude from time to time.

I’m still pretty troubled by this. Why am I troubled... I’ve thought about it many times already, but Sherry is an outrageous beauty. If only she kept her mouth shut, she could match the beauty of a goddess. I can’t calm down when I’m being stared at by such a girl.

“Ah... Errr...”

“What is it?”

“You’re...”

“How about we call each other by our names already? Hayate.”

“—! T-That should be alright, as long as it’s just the name.”

“Wouldn’t it be somewhat strange if you’re just branding me with ‘you’, while I’m calling you by your name?”

When it got pointed out to him like that, it really did appear strange to him.

“Does the manservant intend to go against his master?”

“...I’ve got it already...”

Being glared at by those sharp eyes made him raise the white flag rather than the serpent he had been fighting recently.

“Well then... Sh-Sherry...”

“What is it, I wonder?”

Being called by her name, she expressed a faint smile.

“~~What did you do the year before you came to the academy? Where have you been?”

“I’ve saved up money for the school expenses to enter the academy. It’s an academy for nobles mostly, so the school expenses and entry fee are manyfold of those of a commoner school, you know? Because I held three or five jobs at the same time, it took a terrible amount of stamina.”

“Hee—”

It was no wonder that the exhausting work at ‘Berry-in Café’ seemed to be easy for her.

“Well, it was nonetheless necessary that I received a lot of help from the chairman at the time of the immatriculation, you see? To cause her as little trouble as possible, I keep on working even now, you know?”

“Which reminds me, the chairman does protect you as much as she can, doesn’t she? What kind of relationship do you have?”

“I myself don’t have any special relationship with her, but the chairman seems to have been saved by my late grandmother. They seem to have been close friends, you know? Being her grandchild seems to come with various privileges.”

“Ah, I see.”

Once Hayate had given an appropriate response, the waiter came with drinks and sandwiches with dried meat and vegetables for two.

“Oh, just in case it worries you, I’ve got no experience with working in any indecent establishments, you know?”

“U-Uh-huh, I see.”

Being told something he hadn’t even asked, Hayate faltered with his response.

Sherry sent him a meaningful glance.

“Anxious?”

“Anxious about what?”

“Whether my body’s still pure.”

“BUFU—!”

He spat out the drink, he had just started with, with all his might.

What's this girl spouting out all of a sudden?!

‘How about I say I did worry?’... If I tsukkomi’ed to that extent, I won’t be able to turn back afterwards, so I shouldn’t press on any further.

Towards that attitude, Sherry shrugged her shoulders.

Simultaneously, the illumination inside the establishment suddenly went out.

“W-What now?”

“Calm down. The match is about to start.”

“Match...?”

When he was about to ask back, the walls in the establishment’s interior suddenly casted light.

The three walls apart from the entrance—— reflected something strange.

It was outside. But it certainly wasn’t the landscape outside the establishment.

It looked like a fairly vast location. There was gravel on the ground, weeds beneath the trees, large and small rocks, and a streamlet.

As Hayate was surprised by this sudden event, Sherry leaned herself forward from the other side of the table and explained:

“This establishment, you see, has three walls that are covered with smoothly manufactured materia—— we call it monitors—— the materia is charged with [Clairvoyance] magic. Just now, the broadcast of a match that’s being carried out in a far away country has started.”

In other words, this was an establishment that made it possible to watch a match that wasn’t carried out close by, but in a place far away place – a live broadcast.

Hayate heaved an admiring sigh at the large-scale device.

“And? What match is this now?”

“The [Herfiötur Cup]. The first tournament of the [Eighth Big Walpurgis Night] which determines the strongest hexenritter.”

The strongest hexenritter—— the first milestone on the way to Sherry’s dream.

The festival that determined the strongest hexenritter, called [Walpurgis Night], lasted for about a year and meant a fighting tournament between mutual hexenritter which was carried out by each nation of the continent.

The [Herfiötur Cup] that was broadcasted today was the first tournament of the [Eighth Big Walpurgis Night], and organized by the Starfarm's neighboring country, the Klemond Empire. This place was an arena inside the Klemond Empire too, and the participation rules required one to hold the Empire's nationality.

In short, the [Herfiötur Cup] was a tournament to decide who the strongest hexenritter in the Klemond Empire was.

Similarly to this, the other seven countries also had tournaments, and picked out their strongest hexenritter—— And as for the [Brynhildr Cup], held at the end of the year, the champion hexenritter of each nation would fight with each other, to decide on the strongest hexenritter, both in name and reality.

The date of each country's tournament was different, because the tournaments were staggered by the coordinating countries. The [Eighth Walpurgis Night] acted as a war substitute, but it was also a festival that boosted the whole continents economy. The economical effect was significant. Fortunate Houses even migrated the continent to watch all of the tournaments, and merchants were eager not to let a business opportunity such as that slip through their fingers. If the dates completely overlapped, they'd consequently steal profit from one another and everyone would lose.

For that reason, the Starfarm Kingdom's [Walpurgis Night] was still months ahead, while the Klemond Empire's had already started. Thus it wasn't a problem at all to watch the match through [Clairvoyance].

And as for Hayate's impression, who was witnessing his first [Walpurgis Night]...

“What... is that?”

He didn't have words for this masterpiece.

It wasn't just swords or whips... It was an abnormal battle between hexenritter who utilised: bows and arrows, battle-axes, war hammers, needless-to-say swords and spears, and even as far as natural phenomenon like thunderstorms as weapons.

Slashing attacks and thrusting that he couldn't perceive with his eyes, fluttered about. The ground arose by the yell of a certain hexenritter. When he thought that the earth would suppress everything, the layer was blown away by a fiery explosion and a mud-covered princess knight suddenly appeared, brandishing her blazing spear.

Furthermore, there were various contract beasts fighting in the fray: a Steller's sea eagle clad in lightning; a horned, white horse that flew in the sky; and many others.

The [Walpurgis Night] had a battle royal system, but it wasn't something like several hundred participants fighting simultaneously. Generally, eight to ten were placed per group for the first round, from round two onwards the participants would decrease, and in the end the last eight people that were left participated in the final. In that fight, the victorious hexenritter would be the champion.

This was likely the final that was being broadcast right now, and the eight people fighting were surely the closest to being called the strongest of the Klemond Empire. It'd be reasonable to call this fight something that exceeded common sense.

The current number of hexenritter displayed on all monitors totalled five, and the strength of everyone seemed to be on an equally high level.

It'll become a drawn-out contest... is what Hayate thought as a layman.

That prediction was quickly thrown out—— by the appearance of no more than one more hexenritter.

“There she is, huh...”

Sherry muttered besides him in a small voice.

“Who’s that? For some reason all three monitors are displaying her.”

As the arena was a considerably vast outdoor field, fights had broken out here and there.

Naturally, the spectators wanted to see as many of those fights as possible. That’s why each monitor had shown a different spot, but now all of them projected that one hexenritter.

“The champion of last year’s [Herfiötur Cup] and the year before that – the [Silver Moon Knight] Oltria Altair. Obtaining a third consecutive championship is unheard of, and if she does, she will be recognized as the strongest hexenritter in the present age.”

The strongest hexenritter in the present age!

Hayate was surprised at this terrific career and strongly observed the appearance of the young lady on the monitor.

Oltria Altair was a princess knight whose beautiful face was bested only by her shining silver hair. She guarded her body with minimal armor, such as a chest protector and shin guards. With a sharp gaze, she glared down at the other hexenritter from a somewhat high place.

When the other hexenritter noticed Oltria’s figure, a giant shadow moved at her side.

It... could possibly be described as a giant lizard that had grown wings? If one went only by the appearance, that would probably suffice. However, the strong, intimidating presence that could be felt even through the screen, couldn’t be described with words alone.

“What... is that?”

“It’s a Dragon.”

Or rather—— A giant dragon, and as the Dragon waited next to Oltria, it loosed a roar as if to intimidate the other hexenritter. A tremendous roar that caused the ground to shake.

“Oltria’s contract beast Tiamat. He’s even special among the Dragon types, an existence that bears the superiority of the Five Great Dragon Kings.”

“Dragon... Five Great Dragon Kings...”

The lindworm he had fought recently could probably be called a subspecies of Dragons, but this was the real deal. And she said that he was even something special among that species. When one witnessed the majestic appearance of Tiamat, they’d understand that too.

Beneath Tiamat’s throat—— Oltria touched the contract mark on a place called ‘reverse scale’.

[Cast——]

Through the monitor, her voice was somewhat muffled. Nonetheless, Oltria’s quiet voice clearly rang in Hayate’s ears.

[——Mushnahhu Espada.]

A long sword with a giant silver edge came forth from Tiamat’s contract mark.

However, as it was a [Wand], there was no way that it could be an ordinary sword.

[REAKREAKCREEEEEAAAAAK!]

The sword cried. It was a piercing wailing.

That instant, when one thought that the edge of [Mushnahhu Espada] melted into something gooey, the form completely changed. The sword blade, which was beautifully double-edged, changed into a single-edged one with a great curve, and on that sword serrations emerged, which could tear off flesh like the fangs of a beast.

“That’s one of the [Wand]s Oltria operates, the long sword that manifests intent – [Mushnahhu Espada]. The wielder’s intentions cause the sword to change its form to suit the situation, and thus it deals extremely effective damage to the opponent. Incidentally, following its name, the blade has seven forms in total.”

“...Wait a sec, what do you mean by *one* of the [Wand]s?”

“Just as I said. Inside high-level contract beasts, occasionally several [Wand]s can be evolved... There, Oltria is making her move, isn’t she?”

With a sidelong glance at Hayate, who still had his mouth wide open, Sherry observed the monitor closely.

In the monitor, Oltria, holding [Mushnahhu Espada] in her hand, jumped together with Tiamat down from the top of the hill and started to overrun the hexenritter, who had fought a fierce battle until now.

The battle now resembled a one-sided match between an adult and children.

Oltria wielded [Mushnahhu Espada] and crushed the hexenritter one by one. The arena also had the [Divine Protection of Valhalla] to prevent any physical wounds, but the people cut by [Mushnahhu Espada] still screamed in blood-curling agony and fainted.

“Speaking of which, I haven’t told you about the [Wand] grades, have I?”

“...Grades?”

Sherry said while staring at the massacre in the far away country:

“To put it simple, it’s a way to divide the strength of [Wand]s into classes. Starting from the top they are divided into [Inferno], [Diabolus], and [Grimoire]. In this connection, Oltria’s [Wand]s, including [Mushnahhu Espada], are all classified as [Inferno].”

Even during the explanation, the girl continued to blow down hexenritter on the screen.

Earlier Hayate had evaluated the fight between the other hexenritter to be the highlight, but Oltria’s battle was even above that. The difference in level compared to the other hexenritter was so huge, that it could be called heroic.

“——That’s the first milestone to achieve my dream. If I don’t kick Oltria from the throne, if I don’t get the title of the strongest, I can’t get the peerage of [Glanzweisen] either.”

In the end, the curtain fell on the [Herfiötur Cup] with Oltria as the winner, as expected.

After they left the establishment and seated themselves on a park bench, a short walk away from the establishment, Sherry wanted to hear Hayate's impressions on the match.

“And? What do you think?”

“That's... it's like... hexenritter sure are something...”

Basically, he had felt like this in the mock battle with Victoria too, but after he had seen the [Herfiötur Cup], he realized that his battle had only been ‘school level’.

Frankly speaking, Hayate had probably gotten a bit cocky when he had gotten hold of something like [Seele] and with it triumphed over Victoria.

He felt as if that pride had been completely smashed.

“It's important to realize one's own place, you know?”

“Ugu—”

He couldn't object at all.

After she had said that, she stood up from the bench.

“Well then, we'll proceed to the next.”

“...The next? Where do you intend to go now?”

You're not satisfied until my pride's crushed into the smallest pieces, are you?

However, the words that left her mouth were surprising.

“Hayate couldn’t possible want to end a date with me when it isn’t even dark, right?”

“D-Date?! This is a date?!”

“If a man and a woman go out together on a holiday, it’s enough to call it a date, right? Watching the match was just an opening act.”

“Opening act, you say...”

Hayate had thought that it had been the main act and was dumbfounded.

However, as far as he could tell from Sherry’s attitude, there’d really be more after watching the [Herfiötur Cup].

“We’ll go shopping next. Fun, isn’t it?”

“I-I don’t have any money on me, you know.”

He had nothing on him when he was summoned and still hadn’t gotten his work wages.

“Stupid, of course men don’t pay on dates, right? It’s my treat.”

Which reminded him that the society of this continent believed that women were the stronger sex. Women naturally took the initiative on everything.

Hmm, that kinda feels strange to me too for some reason...

Thanks to the amnesia, Hayate didn't know common things like his own birthday, the history of this country, about hexenritter, servants, and so on; but it seemed he had not forgotten everything. He understood words and phrases, knew his name, and fundamental manners.

However, somehow Hayate had a subconscious feeling that, 'Men should protect women' – something improbable for this society's common sense. For that reason he unintentionally thought in such a scene that, 'As a man, I've got to pay'.

Could this strange feeling also be a clue to his forgotten memories?

"By the way, have you already decided on what you want to buy?"

"Yeah. Let's buy a collar."

".....Eh?"



At the time Hayate and Sherry went on their shopping date, Victoria was in the bath with her own contract beast.

"Does it feel good, Lindis?"

"Sha—"

Gently having the joints of his wings washed, Lindis gave a delightful cry.

It appeared somewhat cramped with its long body wriggled inside the bathtub that was meant for humans, but she didn't like the idea of taking her servant into the large public bath, so it couldn't be helped.

Victoria was washing its body in her room's bath in her birthday suit. The water drops that splashed around wetted and ran down her cleavage and buttocks. Lately, it had become a custom to shower together with her contract beast like this.

“...”

While the sponge glided over its smooth scales, she unconsciously looked for burns.

She knew about the effect of the [Divine Protection of Valhalla], but it had been the first time that she had seen her own contract beast suffering in such a way. ‘Maybe...’, she had gotten anxious. Luckily, she couldn't find any such traces.

She was relieved, but someone kept being on her mind——that man.

“Hayate... Mitsurugi... was it? That commoner...”

She muttered the name of the man who had easily defeated her in a mock battle.

The results were one win, one loss, because she had won the first round hands down. However, the taste of defeat, that she had been forced down, didn't cease in its bitterness at all.

Someone like me... that one-sided... never suffered a wound... to something like a man...

When she remembered the time that he thrusted his flame sword, her skin seemed to burn from the heat of the edge which had been thrusted at the nape of her neck even now.

The 'values regarding men' inside of Victoria had almost solely been built on hearsay to begin with. And so the values were the same as society's – men must have good parentage and be cultivated.

However, the first one of the opposite sex that she had touched apart from her family, had neither a good parentage, let alone was cultivated, nor had he any memories—— and yet he was stronger than her.

Men were weak creatures. That was a given in this world. Victoria, who knew nothing of men but hearsay, believed it to be only natural.

In line with that, they were something to look down upon... and yet.

To suffer damage like that...

The heat on the nape of her neck.

When she was thinking about nothing but Hayate, the heat climbed to every corner of her body and the inside of her chest began to burn just like the sword.

He, who had uprooted her value system turned it upside down, and his gaze – remembering the scene from that time made her shiver all over and her chest to throb.

“Nn...!”

It was the first time that that kind of feeling sprouted inside her.

However... she had heard stories about it from girls of her age when they had met lovely gentlemen at a ball, and now Victoria had probably fallen into a similar state. And it was commonly known as love——

“——Th—! Impossible! Someone like me with the likes of such a rude commoner!”

At any rate, he was a man who had come and suddenly rubbed her breasts on their first meeting.

However, when she thought about Hayate like that, the sensation when he had rubbed them at the time returned...

“~~~Ah, enough!”

Victoria chanted a short spell and booted the bathroom materia up.

The materia had been stored with magic which made hot water come out, and it was possible to regulate the temperature by the way one chanted, but...

“SHAAAAA?!”

“Lindis?! That’s— the heat?!”

Victoria had gotten too worked up about her emotions and messed up the water temperature.

The lindworm had been surprised by the sudden boiling water, rushed out of the bathtub, and twined around her body as if he wanted to protest.

“Wai—! Lindis, that’s too tight... Aah...! ...Cut... it out already! Ah, there’s... don’t!”

—That day, the girl living next to Victoria’s room had thought she heard unladylike screams from the opposite side of the wall, but she knew that the girl next door couldn’t possibly raise such shrieks and dismissed it as a figment of her imagination.





After their shopping was done, Hayate and Sherry went into a café inside the city. It wasn't something like the 'Berry-in Café' – just a normal one. It had outdoor seats, so both of them seated themselves on a white round table, opposite each other, where they could feel a nice breeze on their cheeks.

However, currently something like the fresh breeze didn't concern Hayate at all. Too many other things were on his mind and so he didn't have the time to enjoy the scenery of the city on a holiday.

Reason being, a little while back Sherry had entered *that* kind of specialist shop and in front of his eyes was that 'thing' she had bought.

She had placed two collars on the table.

"I really bought them, huh?"

".....Y-Yeah."

"The collars were a bit expensive as they're made of dragon scales, so we have to spend conservatively for a while, okay? Maybe we should increase our work shifts? If we worked on holidays, it'd bring more income."

Sherry talked in a light-hearted mood about what worried her for a bit, but as far as Hayate was concerned, rather than working on holidays, he had a whole other problem in front of him.

“Hey...”

“What is it?”

“Was are those?”

“Collars.”

“I know that just from looking. But what did you buy them for?”

“To attach them, no?”

Sherry said and took a collar into her hand. She bent forward in Hayate’s direction.

“Hey, hey...”

He predicted what she was going to do with that collar and the corner of his mouth twitched.

“Don’t move...”

“—!”

Whispering that kindly near his ear, caused a sweet excitement to run down his spine, and Hayate’s body froze.

Her hands gently combed the back of his head, and then he heard a clicking sound near his neck...

“That’s it. With that you’re my manservant.”

“...”

As expected it was just a splurge and the collar made from dragon scales didn't feel uncomfortable. It wasn't painful, and even had belt holes to loosen it up.

...However, that didn't change the fact that a collar had been attached to him.

“Now listen...”

This time, for sure, Hayate wanted to properly protest, but— without hesitation another collar was held out in front of him. The one holding it was, of course, Sherry.

She smiled sweetly.

“Now then, next is your turn.”

“M-My turn... for what?”

The truth is that it was something obvious that he didn't even need to ask.

Because the same thing had been done to him a moment ago.

“To put this collar around my neck with your hands, you know?”

Sherry gave the expected answer.

“If you do that, I'll be your slave, right?”

She added those tempting words.

“S-Slave...?!”

Those were exceptionally effective words to a healthy youth like Hayate.

His whole face reddened up in a flash and he became emotionally overwhelmed too. He had completely lost the strength to protest.

“That’s... What do you mean by this whole manservant/slave thing? If I remember correctly, you said it after the mock battle too...”

He barely managed to say that much.

Sherry started to reply in a smooth manner.

“A manservant is someone who works themselves to the bone for the sake of their master, you know? And a slave is someone who devotes their body to their master, right?”

“That doesn’t answer the question. Why have I become your manservant and... why do you... then become a s-slave?”

“That’s because Hayate will protect my dream, right? In other words, that means that as my contract beast—— No, as my familiar, we’ll be fighting together, no?”

“That’s...”

He certainly did say that at the time.

By no means did he just carelessly utter that, but if it also meant being plainly called a ‘manservant’, he’d protest.

“You said that, right? I’m fighting for my own sake. Neither for a greater good, nor justice. It’s just my selfish wish to be reunited with my mother. If you’re fighting for the sake of such a dream, you must certainly be my manservant, right?”

“No, I...”

“Wanted to save me, so you did? But that’s not what your heart says. You fought Victoria by yourself, was there something you got out of it? Isn’t there something you wish to get until you fight to the bitter end in the [Walpurgis Night]?”

“...”

At a loss for words, Hayate shut his mouth.

During his fight, Hayate had only gained the knowledge to control [Seele] and other relevant things. What he wanted was to regain his memories relating to his own roots and not some extra knowledge.

If he kept on fighting, maybe he would recall things other than that knowledge, but... there was no guarantee.

From fighting in the [Eighth Big Walpurgis Night] one gains peerage and a medal of honor. That’s what Sherry wants. I don’t really need that kinda thing... I certainly do lack a purpose to fight, huh?

If he fought nonetheless, he would have to leave the purpose for fighting to Sherry.

To protect her dream, to keep that promise, he would continue to fight to his last breath.

A manservant was a purpose-less laborer. But if instructed by their master, they were people who'd definitely act for the sake of their master's desires.

Even though I don't have any purpose myself, I keep fighting to fulfill the wish of my master... Certainly something a manservant would do, huh...

Even so... her way of thinking was as inflexible as ever.

To put it simply, because contract beasts could be called nothing but manservants as they have to absolutely obey the hexenritter, she couldn't ignore the fact that she made Hayate fight for her own dream – even if it was something he was doing out of own good intentions and beliefs.

To not forget the fact that someone gets hurt because of her.

She called him 'manservant'.

Unintentionally, he let out an astonished sigh.

“Haa... So, what's with this slave thing or whatever?”

“I've said that before, too, haven't I? It's a reward.”

“Reward?”

“There's a compensation due for manual labor, right? I'm not a brute master who'd make their manservant work unpaid.”

“...”

Getting paid or not aside, he wanted to strongly object about the 'not a brute' part.

“You still don’t get it?”

Sherry came to peer directly into Hayate’s eyes.

“A slave devotes their all to their master—— I’m saying that I’m giving you my body, my heart, my everything, you know?”

“Wh—?!”

With the talk continuing into an unforeseen direction, Hayate panicked.

“Don’t just thoughtlessly—”

“It’s not thoughtless or anything.”

Before he could even finish his rebuke, it had been flatly denied.

After that... she sighed.

“...That’s right. Hayate’s rather dense and it would be better to say it clearly, right?”

Sherry looked Hayate in the eyes as directly as ever.

Her gaze was so sharp that it, for the n-th time, startled him.

And then she literally confessed.

“To get straight to the point, I’ve fallen in love with you.”

“...SAY WHAT?!”

This time Hayate completely panicked, reflexively stood up, and unintentionally kicked down the chair in the process.

From the surroundings came shocked stares.

Being showered with attention, he conversely regained his cool, and after apologizing to those around him, he picked up the chair and sat down again.

“L-Listen... What do you mean ‘fallen in love’?”

“Eh? What? Could you possibly not know what ‘fallen in love’ means? I thought that you remembered the words and their meaning, but... Right, you’ve lost your memory, so it can’t be helped, can it? If that’s the case, I’ll go with the overload strategy.”

“Eh?”

“I’ve fallen in love with you. I love you. I like you. I really like you. I’m madly in love. I want to spend my whole life with you. I want to be with you no matter what. When I see you, my chest tightens. My body tightens here and there. My heart throbs. I want to be lovey-dovey. Please eat my cooking every day. Every night, on the bed, lo——”

“WAAA—! WAAA—! STOP! I GOT IT! I GOT IT ALREADY!”

“That so?”

Stopping her smooth, machinegun-like talk, Sherry sipped on her drink. *Wait... wasn’t she about to blurt out something outrageous?!*

“Well, if I was able to convey my feelings, then I’m glad. It’s a beautiful thing to tell one’s feelings, isn’t it?”

“...Eeehm...”

“Though, that now was as embarrassing as expected. There’s only one reason a woman would entrust her body and heart to a man, right? There shouldn’t be a need to make me say it, I wanted you to guess that much.”

It seemed like her composure hadn’t change from earlier, but...

Yeah, yeah, but... in other words, it’s like that, huh?

Remodelling the chest area as if showing them off to me, calling it a date when we’re about to leave, saying suggestive things, all of those were roundabout approaches?

Those had the significance of a straight ball. Or rather, a dead ball.

No, isn’t it worse to be someone who can’t even hit those?

“For now, would it be fine if I asked for the reason?”

“The reason? The reason why I fell in love?”

It was embarrassing to reply, so he nodded in silence.

“Well, the direct reason would be as you’d expect; the time when you became my ally and protected me, right?”

“...Just that?”

“You may say just that, but Hayate...”

Sherry sipped on her drink again.

“I don’t know how much Aria-san has told you, but in the end she probably knew nothing but rumors and hearsay, right?”

“That’s true, I guess.”

“My family fell to ruins when I was a child, we were driven out of our territory, and the whereabouts of both my parents are unknown. My mother was branded a traitor; we were discriminated and persecuted by those around us; my grandmother, who I loved dearly, died soon after; and finally, I was all alone. Like that, I had neither friends nor family, and I kept fighting the loneliness for my dream which will let me puff up my chest with pride towards my peers.”

“...”

“When I put it into words, the contents don’t even take up as many as 110 odd words, but for me it amounts to 16 years of my life... One day in front of someone like me, who continued living that way for 16 years, a gallant suddenly appears and happens to be a boy who comes to save me like a prince on a white steed, then I can’t help that something happens inside me, no?”

Prince on a white steed... Being told that face to face made a shiver run down my spine!

“That’s, well, I’m amazed myself that I’ve been deceived so easily. But I can’t help that either. There’s no real reason to feel that way. Humans can be quite simple when it comes to feelings of affection. When you were being nice to me, I easily fell for you. Sorry for being so simple.”

“...”

“But I’m in love for sure, so it’s fine. I love you, so as compensation for fighting as my manservant, I’ve no problem giving myself to you. That’s how I am, you see? So what’s your answer?”

He was urged on, but didn’t know what the right thing to say was.

It was just too sudden for Hayate.

Being told that he was loved by such a bishoujo, or that she’d be fine with becoming his slave... to that, he didn’t have a reply.

Noticing he was wavering, Sherry quietly crossed her arms and squinted a bit.

“You don’t want to become my master?”

“~~~!”

“To underestimate it, I thought that it was the yearning desire of every boy to be able to do whatever one likes to the body of a bishoujo like myself.”

“Did you just call yourself a bishoujo...?”

“Ara, you want to object?”

He couldn’t object, how frustrating.

It was plain reality that Sherry was without a doubt a bishoujo of the highest class.

“Something like this part...”

Sherry crossed her arms under her breasts and moved them up and down.

They swayed with a *pyon*.

“Or this...”

She alternated the way she crossed her legs.

His eyes were captivated by her charming thighs covered in white kneesocks.

“This could all be yours, you know...”

“.....”

Even if I'm told that, what am I supposed to do...

I saved Sherry that time because I thought I wanted to and just did it, but I wasn't after this kind of outcome at all.

Well, I did try to show off a little bit, but...

“.....Haa, it's fine already. You don't have to answer right away.”

“Eh... That'd be fine?”

“Yeah, it's fine. Actually, I didn't really expect an immediate answer. You're a good-for-nothing after all.”

“...Compared to all this ‘I like you’, ‘I love you’, and all, you're not stingy with the abusive language anyway, huh?”

“Eh? But you *are* a good-for-nothing, right? Even though you’re sleeping next to a lightly dressed bishoujo like this night after night, you haven’t shown a single sign of making a move on me.”

“...”

He couldn’t object.

“...Could it be that you’re impotent?”

“THAT’S NOT THE CASE!”

Negated as expected!

“If I were like that, I wouldn’t have night after night troubles to... Ah.”

“Troubles to...?”

Uwaa, she’s got a terrific wide grin now.

She already looked like a cat that had found a mouse to play with.

“Every night you’re having troubles to what, I wonder?”

Aah.

That’s so ridiculously shaming.

“Errr... I’ll be more obedient, so please forgive me!”

He prostrated himself vigorously.

“That so? Well, it’s the truth that the reply doesn’t urge, so do as you like.”

“Aah, by the way...”—— Sherry recalled something.

From her shawl bag, Sherry took out a horse-riding whip.

“I tried buying a whip with the collar.”

“WHY?!”

It appeared like she had bought it in the middle of shopping without Hayate noticing.

“When one talks about disciplining a manservant or slave, it comes to a whip, right? Though I got worried about your body and chose something normal.”

“You should first of all look up the meaning of ‘normal’ in a dictionary!”

“By the way, I bought two of them. Here, this is yours.”

“Eh?”

She took out another leather whip from her bag.

Sherry placed the whip’s handle in Hayate’s direction.

‘That’s yours’—— She said.

In other words...

To Sherry? With that whip? I’m supposed to...?

He started to picture cracking the whip in his imagination.

[WAHAHAHA! YOU LIKE IT LIKE THAT? HUH?]

[Aaa~~~n!]

In his ears Sherry's voice echoed in a more unladylike way than the time he took out the flame sword.

——It seemed as if he'd get a nosebleed from picturing too much, so he hurriedly drove away his delusions.

“I don't need it! That kinda thing!”

“Ara, that so? Well, it's not absolutely necessary, so it's fine. But I intend to use it very much.

“Very much, you say...”

“You've already become my manservant after all.”

“That's already a decided fact, huh...”

Even though she said she'd wait for his answer, it seemed to be decided that Hayate was now her manservant.

“Ara, that's only natural, right?”

When she said that, she uncrossed her arms and legs, and leaned her body over the table in the same way she did when she attached the collar to him previously.

And then she inserted her finger in the gap between the collar and his skin, and strangled him tightly.

With the other hand she supported his cheek.

Her face drew close.

“You know, I want to obtain you, no matter what.”

“_____”

“I said that I’d wait for your reply earlier, but, you see, this doesn’t mean that I’d just withdraw obediently if you said you didn’t want to. Even if I have to mobilize all kinds of means, I’d definitely get my hands on you. You’re bound to my purpose, to appease me. Whatever might happen, I will never be separated from you. I definitely won’t hand you over to anyone or anything. I want to own you, your all—— Because I love you.”

“...Th—!”

She suddenly breathed on his ear.

Her long breath was hot, and moist, and made him shiver.

“On the other hand, I’m giving you my everything. I’m offering you my body and heart. I’ll accept your every desire...”

...Her tone is way too erotic! She’s saying it erotically, but it’s plain scary!

Up until now, it seemed that being loved was one of the blessings to be born a man, but he saw now that too much love seemed to endanger one’s life.

“I intend to satisfy any play you desire, no matter where, no matter when, you know?”

“Don’t talk about plays while we’re in broad daylight!”

After the two of them had finished their tea, the sun had started to set and so they headed back to Diaspell Royal Academy.

On the way from the gate to the dorm, Sherry talked to him in a mood that was a bit more cheerful than usual.

“Well then, the midterms will take place soon, won’t they? We’ve got to perform well and cut into the top of the [Internal School Ranking]. That’s our first goal.”

“What are those midterms?”

“They’re similar to the practical test, you know? Test periods are like that, I wonder whether there’ll also be an explanation from Schwartz-sensei tomorrow?”

Well, is it okay to wait until tomorrow... huh?

At that time, Hayate discovered the familiar figure of a person and slowly stopped.

“Yoo, Sherry-kun, Hayate-kun.”

Leaning with her back on a pillar of the dorm, Aria waved her hand in a friendly manner.

Sherry’s expression promptly clouded.

“...You seem to be awfully close with Aria-san.”

Do I feel intent to kill?!

Cold sweat began to run down Hayate’s forehead.

Hayate was trembling with fear, but a bright smile floated on Aria's face while she didn't notice anything and drew closer.

“You've been gone for the longest time, was it a date?”

“WHA—?!”

“Yeah, that's correct.”

Sherry answered without a change in her countenance, in contrast to the shocked Hayate.

“How enviable. Would you go on a date with me next, Hayate-kun?”

“Eh?”

“I totally want to check every corner of your body.”

“REFUSED!”

He didn't know what was happening anymore.

“So? What business could Aria-san have with us, I wonder?”

“Hm... Well, it's like this, you see. Oooi, Kiruru!”

Aria said and turned around.

Following her gaze, the small figure of a bashful girl came out from the other side of the pillar.

Hm? Haven't I seen her somewhere...?

Hayate remembered this girl called Kiruru, but he couldn't quite remember where he had seen her.

When he tilted his head, Aria dragged Kiruru by her hand and marched her over to him.

“C’mon, Kiruru has some business with Hayate-kun, right?”

“With me?”

Although he remembered her, there shouldn't have been too much interaction between him and her.

While Hayate wondered what it could be, he waited for the words of the girl whose back was being pushed by Aria, until she was in front of him.

“Excuhuuse... mee...”

“Yeah?”

Kiruru faltered many, many times over, casted down her eyes, and was gently stopped by Aria when she was tried to run away... She shut her eyes tightly as if trying to find her resolve and then opened them.

“Ha—... Hayate-san! P-Please maaahaaarry mee...”

Chapter 4: Confession and Instant Mayhem

Waking up this morning was the worst.

When one woke up with their whole body tied up in ropes and hanging down from the ceiling, anyone would think that, right?

“Ara, you woke up by yourself today, huh?”

“...Untie the rope.”

In response to my demand, Sherry answered with a cold stare.

“Ara, no can do. It’s as if you’ve already decided that I am the culprit.”

“I saw you locking the door last night. We’re two people in a room that can’t be entered, I’m the victim, so you’re the offender, right?”

“Too bad. There’s a hole in your reasoning. You said you saw me locking the door, but in reality I only pretended to lock it. This room could be entered. Anyone could be the culprit, you know?”

“Even if I believe that for argument’s sake, the moment you left it unlocked on purpose you’ve at least become an accomplice, haven’t you?!”

She had participated in this crime either way, it made no difference.

“Ehm, the rope is slowly cutting into me and it really hurts, so can you let me down already?”

“That’s just the right disciplining for a flirtatious manservant.”

“I don’t get what you mean by disc...”

“I’ve gone through great lengths to buy this whip, so shall we use it?”

“I’m Sherry-sama’s loyal manservant! I’d never be unfaithful, so please forgive me!”

He mobilized his meager vocabulary and tried to do nothing but speak well to her and her horse-riding-whip-wielding hand. Somehow or other, he was forgiven.

It was that kind of ridiculous exchange right in the morning...

“So? Why did you have to shape me like a bagworm first thing in the morning?”

Hayate said in a resentful way while giving a sidelong glance at the second bed in the room. Previously, Hayate had always slept on the floor, but yesterday the academy had finally arranged his own bed.

Even when he had been sleeping on the floor, thanks to the carpet, his body didn’t hurt; but even so, that was a different feeling entirely. In fact, when he had fallen asleep last night, he thought he would wake up feeling a lot better in the morning...

“Please try to look for the reason in your chest.”

“...”

“Or why don’t you try looking for it in my chest?”

Boing.

“No need!”

“That so? If you need a hint, you can always touch them. For one touch, three hours worth of your working salary goes into my pocket.”

“...You’re taking a fee?”

That was close. Had he been tempted into touching her bouncing breasts, it would’ve cost him three hours worth working in the ‘Berry-in Café’.

If a student paid the school expenses, food for the contract beast was included. So as long as Sherry kept paying the expenses, he didn’t have to pay for his meals. However, on top of that, letting him stay in her room in the dorm for free – as expected – didn’t look good in his eyes. So last week they had a discussion and decided that he’d pay half of her expenses from the money he received from his job. And the other half went into his own pocket in case there was something he needed himself.

Since his official position was that of a contract beast, he couldn’t even freely take a stroll outside the academy, but he worked by the sweat of his brow and was deeply moved to be able to get that reward... Going by that, Hayate was anxiously awaiting his payday.

Well, enough of the money issues.

Back to the main point.

Wait, the reason why Sherry is so ill-humored can only be that, huh...

He flashed back to the events that transpired yesterday immediately after they had returned from their date.



“Ha—... Hayate-san! P-Please maaahaaarry meehee!”

“.....Ha?”

His jaw dropped.

Towards the astounding confession from a girl he wasn't even acquainted with, he couldn't help but be dazed.

As for the confessing Kiruru – her cheeks had blushed and she kept looking up to Hayate with her teary eyes.

“Errr...”

“Please marry me!”

“.....Eh? Why?”

“SHOOOCKED!”

When he told her his honest thoughts, Kiruru staggered as if she had received a blow.

The black dog, seemingly her contract beast, roared.

“GAU—!”

“Eh—? What’s— GYAAAA!”

Hayate screamed as he was struck by lightning that had erupted from around the feet of the beast.

“S-Stop, Kuro!”

The lightning attack stopped thanks to Kiruru’s intervention.

Hayate had barely escaped electrocution, but his appearance had turned into something quite amusing with the hairs all over his body standing on end.

“Aah—... That’s, errr... First of all, I’d be grateful if you could tell me how it came to this.”

“Came... to this?”

“I mean, why did you suddenly come and ask me something outrageous like to marry you.”

“BECAUSE HAYATE-SAN SAW ME NAKED!”

“Eh?”

Immediately after Kiruru had screamed that and her face had blushed again, Hayate’s own face received a magnificent slap from Sherry.

“THAT HURT!”

He almost fell over from the impact. Her wrist snaps were effective.

“...”

“HIII!”

Pierced by Sherry’s glare, Kiruru withdrew behind Aria’s back.

In the blink of an eye she had gained complete control over Kiruru.

“...What does she mean by ‘saw me naked’, I wonder?”

Sherry inquired with a penetrating cold voice.

Hayate got the feeling that he wanted to hide behind Aria’s back too.

“I see. Well, please calm down for now, Sherry-kun. I’ll tell you the details.”

As expected of the head of the Rivaldi class. Maybe because she was used to mediate disputes, she began to speak to intercede between the parties.

“First of all... right, let me introduce her. Her name’s Kiruru Demeter. The Demeter Family’s oldest daughter – my childhood friend.

“...I’m in your care.”

The scared Kiruru popped her head out from behind Aria and bowed.



“Well, as ya can see, she’s a shy kid, but good at heart. So could’cha not glare at her like that?”

“Why did that shy-but-good-at-heart kid suddenly propose to my manservant?”

Ignoring Aria’s request, Sherry kept showering Kiruru with cold-hearted glares. The girl shrieked and hid herself behind her childhood friend’s back again.

Expressing a wry smile, Aria continued with her explanation.

“The Demeter House... well, how ta put it, the parentage has’n extremely strong sense of virtue. They have a law which says that one can’t be seen naked by anyone but their fiancée. Originally, there wasn’t a need ta worry about this law in an all-girls academy, but... Hayate-kun took a peek at her naked body in the baths not too long ago, right?”

“Ah...”

With that, Hayate finally understood that the naked girl, whom he had seen in the baths in which he had been brought to by Aria on his very first day after being summoned, was the Kiruru in front of his eyes.

“Well, it’s somethin’ like that. If things stay as they are, it’d worry Kiruru. That’s why she wanted Hayate-kun ta take responsibility.”

“And so the theory is that if she married—... if he’d become her fiancée, the ‘seen naked’ incident wouldn’t count?”

“That’s right.”

Aria nodded.

After she understood the circumstances, Sherry sighed anew.

“Simply put, all of this is my horny manservant’s fault. I’m sorry for not disciplining him enough.”

“That’s cru—BU!”

As Sherry crushed him underfoot with all her strength, Hayate spat out all of the air in his lungs.

“No, it’s about half Aria’s fault too...”

“Well, that’s right, ain’t it? It’s my responsibility too. It’s because of my inexhaustible interest in Hayate-kun, but I couldn’t refuse Kiruru’s request to mediate the relationship b’tween the two of ‘em. I’ve caused trouble, right?”

Aria bowed her head.

After such a meek apology, one would normally want to forgive them, but... his back was being grinded down with twisting movements from his seemingly completely unforgiving master, so she wouldn’t just say ‘Oh, it’s all good’.

“...”

On the other hand, the still scared person in question, Kiruru, kept hiding behind Aria’s back. She looked like a little sister clinging to and relying on her older sister, while not knowing what to do in the troubling situation.

Or to begin with, what was Aira thinking, driving Kiruru into a situation where she had to marry due to family rules?

“Listen, errr... Kiruru, right?”

“Y-YESH?!”

Kiruru’s voice cracked and her shoulders cowered in anxiety.

The moment he had called her name again, Sherry’s killing intent resurrected. He thought he felt the pressure on his shoulders increase, but he ignored that for now. Though his spine was already groaning.

“That’s, you know... I for one don’t really care about family laws or whatever, but wouldn’t you hate marrying for such a reason?”

“...”

Kiruru seemed to hesitate with her answer.

One more push, huh?—— When he thought that and was about to open his mouth again...

“I don’t disl... I think I don’t like it, but I don’t dislike it.”

“...Huh?”

He thought he heard an awfully confusing reply.

“W-Which is it now?”

“Ehm, family rules are important, so I don’t dislike them, but... when I think about what we will be doing after we get married, it’s a bit scary... and what things I’ll be made to do, right...?”

Well, that is a bit scary, but don’t you have other things you should worry about here?

When he thought that and looked at his counterpart’s face... he didn’t understand why, but she seemed to be giggling.

“B-Being seen naked and then forced to get married... if that happens, these things and those things would be done to me and... A-Aaaah, you can’t! Don’t! So suddenly...!”

“Err... Hello, you still there?”

He tried confirming with her, but there was no reply.

“Yeah, sorry. She seems to have gone on a quick trip.”

Aria apologized for some reason as she noticed Kiruru’s state.

“...What’s wrong with that kid?”

Even Sherry seemed a bit worried.

Aria returned a wry smile.

“Yeah. Well, Kiruru’s a bit of an ‘intense assumption’ type, you see. Since Hayate-kun saw her naked, she kept havin’ the illusion, ‘What kind of things will I go through after I’m forced to get married to Hayate-kun’, day after day.”

“.....Hee—”

Sherry nodded with a bit of wariness about her.

“By the way, in Kiruru’s delusions, Hayate-kun’s frequently actin’ like a brute, you know?”

“.....Hee—”

Hayate could only reply the same way Sherry did.

With nothing more to say on the situation, an awkward silence ensued, broken only by Kiruru’s uncontrollable giggles in her questionable trance.

“Ehe, ehehehe...”

Originally, he had thought that she seemed like a very young and fragile girl, but she too, was a pretty strange kid.



Well, that happened on the day he had received a sudden proposal. There probably hadn’t been any other cases of girls proposing to him before he had lost his memories.

This uncommon experience happened yesterday. This morning Hayate had been hung from the ceiling and now he felt tired even though it was just after a holiday. But the working schedule didn’t wait for anyone. Once he was dressed, he hurriedly seated himself on the window seat next to Sherry on the other side of the classroom.

Noticing the collar on his neck, the girls in the class whispered to each other, but he just gazed out the window and tried not to let it get into his ears as much as possible until the teacher, Lela, entered the classroom.

“Well then, the midterm examination is only ten days away. The results there will influence the [Internal School Ranking] and come into use for the ranking of you lowlives.”

Lela, standing on the podium, announced at the very beginning of her speech.

Midterm examination... The thing Sherry mentioned yesterday, huh?

It'll surely be something like the practical test.

Hayate listened carefully to the words of the black-clothed teacher.

“This year the examination will involve eight-way battle royales. To fit the number of first-years exactly, the number of people per group *must* add up to eight.”

“B-BATTLE ROYALE?!”

His exclaimed by reflex as he heard that the test would be more dangerous than expected. Lela glared at him and he quickly covered his mouth.

“This time, for your first examination, the first-years in the same class will draw lots that will divide them into groups. After the midterms, the groups will be based on the top, mid, and low ranks—— in other words, students close in ability will be put into the same group regardless of their year.”

To put it simply, this time the test would be carried out between the students of the Rivaldi class, but afterwards, their opponents would be decided according to their rank.

And so, they would be able to catch a thorough glimpse of their real abilities.

“The examination will be held on an outdoor battlezone in a territory that is under the direct control of the Queen, like every year. There might be those who don’t know about it, so I’ll let you know just in case. The examination grounds contain a lot of mithril underneath. Therefore, the entirety of it is under the [Divine Protection of Valhalla], so you can rest assured.”

Following Lela’s explanation were some relieved sighs.

Hayate was one of them. For now, he didn’t have to worry about getting injured, if the [Divine Protection of Valhalla] was present.

Hm... ?

He suddenly noticed that beside him, Sherry didn’t look happy at all.

But he couldn’t think of a reason. To him, Lela’s explanation hadn’t had any disheartening elements...

“Now then, we’ll now carry out the lottery to decide the examination groups. Come and pull the lots according to your attendance number.”

It might be a given, but it was Sherry’s role to draw the lot.

The lot that she had drawn had a red seven written on it.

“Everyone has drawn, right? Now, look at the blackboard.”

Lela said and prompted everyone to pay attention.

She then began to mutter something, and five or six pieces of chalk suddenly began to float.

“What’s that?”

“That’s [Automatic] magic. She’s coupling the lots, see?”

The [Automatic] magic operated the pieces of chalk to write the names of the grouped students on the blackboard one by one.

Sherry’s name was put into the red group, of course.

In the same group as Aria, Kiruru... and Victoria, huh?

While confirming the names listed in the red group, Hayate sighed in his mind at the grouping of these various hard-to-deal-with members.

For some reason or another, he looked in the direction of Victoria’s seat, who above anyone else seemed to be an opponent he was bound to by fate.

“...!”

At exactly the same moment, Victoria had looked his way too. Her eyes met with Hayate's and she quickly averted her gaze.

“It should be fine, but please confirm yourselves whether your name's on there just to be sure. If you've been overlooked, report it at once.”

For a short while, Lela surveyed the classroom, but no one raised their hands.

“...Alright. Then that's it for the midterm grouping. From tomorrow onwards until the examination day, classes will end in the morning. Give your everything in self-training or arrange your condition.”

After that, Lela added something else.

“As you lowlives know, the first- and second-placed in the [School Intern Ranking] will each be handed a medal for the [Reginleiv Cup] held by the Diaspell Royal Academy.”

[Reginleiv Cup]...?

Instinctively becoming attentive at the word that had come up, Hayate whispered into Sherry's ear:

“Could the [Reginleiv Cup] possibly be related to the [Walpurgis Night]?”

“Yeah, that's right. The [Reginleiv Cup] is one tournament of the [Eighth Big Walpurgis Night]. The tournament that decides Starfarm's strongest hexenritter.”

He had vaguely guessed from the name, but it was like that after all.

“For the sake of polishing the next generation, the kingdom gives the academy two medals to let young and talented hexenritter earn experience as fast as possible—— That’s the reason why I chose this academy.”

Sherry’s number one goal – dominating the [Walpurgis Night] and acquiring the peerage of [Glanzweisen].

To take the shortest route to her goal, she did the unreasonable and entered this academy.

But, above all, it’s a rugged road to try and take either first or second place in the [School Internal Ranking]... Hayate thought, but Lela added some more.

“There are probably those here thinking that it’s too soon for them, but there have been many instances of first years winning a medal in the past. Combat experience is important, but it never comes down to only that. Talent, senses—— and more than anything, I consider the will to never give up and tenacity as the most important factors that will distinguish the victor from the loser. If you’re my students, then go for the moon without ever giving up—— That’s all.”

Following what was said in the morning, the classes on that day ended before noon.

However, for some reason Sherry didn’t stand up to leave, but instead looked like she was deep in thought as she watched the other girls file out of the classroom.

“You’re not going to the training grounds?”

He had thought for sure that she would without doubt leave to go and train in a flash, so this came as somewhat of a surprise.

“I’ll go... but if possible I want to make use of the outdoor battlezone.”

Sherry frowned and murmured that as if speaking to herself.

“If I remember correctly, there is a training ground which simulates an outdoor battle, isn’t there? ...Can’t it be used freely?”

“Using the outdoor battlezone is the worst. You have to get at least three people to apply for it, you know? It’s different from the solo training area and mock battle arena, a whole group has to occupy such a vast place.”

If one was by themselves, they used the solo training area. If there were two people who wanted to have a match, they would use the mock battle arena. It was like that.

“And, after all, you don’t have any friends, huh...”

SLAP—!

“THAT HURT!”

“It seems that you’re insulting me on purpose because you want me to punish you more and more.”

“LIKE HELL I AM!”

Sherry completely ignored his tsukkomi.

“The exam will contain a battle royale, so I’m assuming it will be like the [Walpurgis Night].”

“Yeah, that’s why the exam is using an outdoor battlezone, right?”

“In an outdoor battle, factors such as using obstacles to your advantage and tracking down your enemies become important. Especially in our case. Both of us are human and that will likely force us into a disadvantage.”

In a battle royale, which will take place on a vast battlefield, not only was your fighting ability important but also the ability to spot the enemy first. If one found their opponent first, it’d grant them a vast selection of actions choose: like a preemptive attack, a surprise attack, or avoiding the battle completely.

“And then there’s the most crucial weakness of our pairing in contrast to others.”

“Eh? What weakness do you mean?”

“Myself. I’m only a hexenritter in name, so my battle power is inferior to others’.”

In the case of normal pairings, the hexenritter held the battle power through the [Wand] and the contract beast had strength by nature. However, in Hayate and Sherry’s case, it greatly leaned to just one person.

“The battle is decided when the hexenritter faints: so even in the case that you’re fine, if I suffer damage, it’s all over. That’s why we must improve our teamwork to compensate for that disadvantage together.”

“Hmm, so wouldn’t it be better to train at the outdoor battlezone after all?”

“Sure would. I’d even say that we must.”

He understood Sherry’s thinking. And also the reason.

However, the problem hadn’t been settled—— Namely, not having companions to train with.

“We need a group of three in order to receive permission for the outdoor training zone, so one more, huh?”

“No, two more. You’re not included.”

“...Now that you mention it...”

Hayate was basically treated as a contract beast. He didn’t count as a person.

Every time Hayate was reminded of that fact, it saddened him.

“Yoo, you two.”

At that time, they suddenly heard a voice from behind.

When both of them turned around, Aria was standing there waving her hand openheartedly with Kiruru, who was once again hiding behind Aria’s back.

“To what do I owe the honor of this visit, I wonder?”

Sherry inquired in a business-like tone.

“Don’t’cha wanna use the outdoor battlezone at the training grounds?”

“...Why would you ask that?”

“Cause the test’s around the corner. Everyone feels like usin’ it, you know?”

“...”

“Just kiddin’. Truth is, this little one here was eavesdroppin’.”

Aria, without a shred of shyness, pointed at the mechanical owl that was sitting on her shoulder.

“Kyururu.”

Her Miming contract beast Miria let out a cry and puffed up its chest. ‘Ehem’, she then said.

“So, how ‘bout it? With Kiruru and me, we’d be exactly three people. We’re in the same red group for the midterms and it’s a rare chance, so why not practice together?”

It seemed to be the most perfect proposal one could ask for.

But Sherry made a complicated expression.

“Isn’t another way to think about this that we’re competing against each other, so we shouldn’t practice together?”

“Hmm, wouldn’t it still be fine if you’d just think about that some more? If you go by that, then all students around here are rivals. Wouldn’t that way to think lead our precious student life into a strained atmosphere?”

“...”

“Actually, right now, we’ve been talking about how to... GYAA—!”

He received a blow from the whip. His back hurt big time.

“What a learn-resistant manservant.”

“...What an ever-merciless girl.”

When Hayate glared at Sherry in bitterness, someone suddenly caressed his back gently.

“Are you alright?”

It was Kiruru with a worried expression.

So gentle... seems like she only gets weird those times when she runs wild with her delusions.

It subconsciously touched Hayate’s heart.

Seeing the two like that, Aria let out a small giggle.

“Truth is, Kiruru said that she wanted to practice together with Hayate-kun, ya see? So please think about it.”

When Aria played her trump card, the face of the girl caressing Hayate’s back suddenly grew red.

“...”

Sherry looked at Kiruru's and Aria's faces in turns and... finally let out a sigh and stood up as if she had no other choice.

“Fine. In this world there are things one has to do and things one can't be stubborn about.”

This time, it was the latter.

Sherry accepted the proposal to practice with Aria and company.

The training grounds. Outdoor battlezone.

This was an area whose sole purpose is to simulate outdoor battles – consequently, it was vast by nature. It was just like the mock battle arena, but additionally, it confined the field of vision with obstacles like artificial forests, rocks, and similar things. For that sake, they had piled up soil to create different ground levels. One didn't know how far they would have to advance until they'd hit a wall.

That alone made the outdoors area look spacious already, but during this period of time, there wasn't just one group that used this whole area by themselves, of course. The time limit that each group could use it was decided beforehand. Furthermore, it had been divided into four channels side-by-side. Thanks to that, four different groups could practice on it at the same time.

Hayate and company had been told to use the northernmost one of those four pieces and in the other fields to the south, respectively three other groups did their own training.

“Not only will it be vaster than this, the real testing ground won’t have walls either, instead the borders will be decided on the range of the [Divine Protection of Valhalla], and chasing the enemy to the end of this range —— although in the training grounds case it’s the walls—— will be an effective strategy even in the real deal.”

While Aria explained that in a smooth way, the others carefully did their stretches.

“So, should Sherry-kun and Hayate-kun start from the eastern, and Kiruru from the western border? I’ll be the referee.”

“Eh? Are you fine with that?”

He reflexively asked. Would it be alright for Aria not to practice herself?

“I only entered the academy ’cause I love contract beasts, I can’t fight at all. I don’t care about the [School Internal Ranking] either, you know? Plus, Miria’s great at scouting and gathering intel, so I can show you guys everything about how you moved and how you fought after you’re done, alright?”

“I see... Though I still feel somewhat bad about making you do that...”

“It’s fine, it’s fine.”

Aria saw Hayate and the others off with a smile.

“She’s a good girl, huh?”

“Good girl? Aria-san? Or Kiruru-san?”

“Well, I meant Aria just now. But I think Kiruru’s a good girl too, isn’t she?”

“...You seem to be really pleased with those two, don’t you?”

Just when he thought ‘Huh?’, Sherry had already tripped him up.

“UWA—!”

He tumbled, but she took his arm as he fell and gently absorbed the impact, so his butt didn’t hurt as much when it hit the ground.

It didn’t really hurt, but naturally there was a gap in height between them now.

When she looked down on Hayate, she... narrowed her gaze into something even colder than permafrost.

“Don’t misunderstand, Hayate.”

Sherry extended her long index finger towards Hayate’s neck... and pulled the collar up while it hung on her first knuckle.

The pressure caused by the collar on the other side of his neck forced him to raise his face up.

He was brought so close to her that he almost hit the tip of her nose.

“You’re my manservant, so being swooned by another woman is outrageous. If you, by any chance, dare to wag your tail at anyone else without concern, then...”

“...Then?”

“I’ll pull it out.”

“What?!”

“I’ll put it out.”

“You said it twice?!”

In the end, she hadn’t said what, but her eyes were serious.

He did wonder whether that was jealousy talking, but if he asked that now, whatever *it* was would be pulled out on the spot, so he only nodded.

After that, the two of them resumed their walk to the eastern wall.

Before they knew it, the artificial forest had come to an end and they reached terrain that consisted of nothing but rocks and sand. It appeared that they had constructed a variety of outdoor environments.

“Oh, I can see the wall.”

Thanks to the decreasing number of things that obstructed his view, he could see the edge of the training area.

“Speaking of which, Kiruru’s...”

“Ha?”

“No, please don’t speak with such an overbearing voice... I mean, we’re about to start our practice fighting with her, so I wanna know what kind of hexenritter she is. And about her black contract beast.”

He remembered being struck by lightning yesterday, but it probably had other abilities too. Since Hayate would soon head out and fight it, he wanted to prepare counter-measures all the more.

“Kiruru-san’s contract beast is a Black Beast. It’s also called Hell Hound. Or even the personification of death and lightning. Its abilities are extremely powerful and on top of that it’s good at everything.”

“More specifically?”

“First of all, it has the agility of a wolf. Fangs and claws. Sharp instincts. Plus, it generates electricity from its fur and can either clad its whole body in it or fire it off. It is even able to use long range attacks. It’s an opponent you can neither keep close nor far.”

“That alone makes it scary enough for me... So, what about the main [Wand]?”

“...If I remember correctly, then Kiruru-san has a gauntlet, but I don’t know the details of its abilities.”

“You don’t?”

“Its abilities are of the lightning school, if I’m not mistaken. But I’ve never seen it in practice, you know?”

“Why?”

“That girl wasn’t that enthusiastic during practical lessons. She was absent in the last mock battle too.”

Simply put, they didn’t know how Kiruru fought.

Although he had really gotten into polishing his own skills, in reality Hayate still wasn’t too familiar with fighting himself.

“Well, shall we try it without getting too serious for the time being?”

“Nope, if we’re doing it, we’re doing it right. Turn everything into charcoal, don’t spare a speck of dust.”

“...Ever wondered whether you not having friends is because of that personality of yours?”

Well, people had also been biased due to her family incidents in the past.

“...”

Or did she get this personality because people were holding these prejudices to begin with?

Offensive speech and conduct to defend herself from the surrounding malice.

Offense is the best defense.

Defeating her enemies crushingly.

That's why she bares her fangs at anyone without a concern...

At least, they were able use the outdoor battlezone now, thanks to these girls.

He thought that it'd probably be fine if she opened her heart to other people – even if it was just a bit.

As he pondered, a bolt of electricity went to the ceiling on the edge of the western wall.

Kiruru had arrived at her starting point.

Almost simultaneously, Hayate and Sherry had also arrived at the edge of the eastern wall.

“We have to send a signal like that too, right? Hurry up.”

Sherry presented her contract mark in her cleavage to Hayate.

“...Got it...”

Saying that, he extended his hand near her breasts while getting nervous as expected.

Hayate stiffened his contract-mark-bearing right hand and placed it on Sherry's breasts.

“CREATION!”

“Nn... Aaah!”

He yelled the same phrase as before and pulled out the flame sword while Sherry's suffocating voice echoed.

Similar to the time when he battled Victoria, power flowed into him from the sword again, but...

“...? What’s wrong?”

“Nothing...”

What’s going on... Something feels out of place.

Something like a strange ‘gap’, which he hadn’t noticed in the battle with Victoria—— Had it been there from the start? Or was it the first time now? He couldn’t tell.

However, it was weird for sure.

It was a feeling that *something* was lacking.



He didn't know what it was yet, but... for now, Hayate decided to ignore this out-of-place feeling. He had to concentrate on the combat practice at hand.

“Let's start then.”

“Ready any time.”

Hayate pointed the flame sword to the heavens and released a pillar of fire.

That was the starting signal.

“O those who dance in the wind, bestow thy blessing unto me which doth releases my link with thy earth——
[Himmelsschritt].”

First of all, Sherry secured her own mobility through magic.

Once he confirmed she was ready, Hayate shouldered his sword and sprinted off. Before long, Sherry caught up to him with her feet slightly floating above the ground as she glided with her magic.

Next, to proceed head-on, they rushed into the artificial forest that they had passed through in the blink of an eye moments ago.

“How do you think they will attack us?”

“The Black Beast excels at close and ranged combat, so their tactical freedom's diverse.”

“Trying to get into close combat as much as I can would be fine, right?”

He might've been able to send flames out of his sword, but it lacked accuracy.

“Well, first of all we have to locate Kiruru-san’s whereabouts.”

“True that.”

Hayate and Sherry were without doubt inferior to normal contract beasts when it came to their tracking abilities.

If the Black Beast didn’t just have the agility of a wolf, but also its sense of smell, then surely the first move would be made by Kiruru and company. So the problem was how to brace themselves for the preemptive attack and how best to counter it.

Going by that, the artificial forest was a troublesome place as it made it hard to secure a clear vision, but...

“Should we burn the obstacles to ashes, I wonder?”

“Wouldn’t that make people angry?! ”

“But it’d be fine if it was a real fight, wouldn’t it?”

“It wouldn’t be so bad if we could turn them to ashes in an instant, but burning down real trees takes quite some time, right...? The path would be blocked by the fire and our vision would be hazy, wouldn’t that just cause another problem for us?”

“When you put it like that, it might be true.”

“Right?”

“Hayate is pretty audacious for his social standing.”

“Huh? Are you insulting me?”

It's so absurd.

I seem to have gotten used to it...

While he was running and clearing away the branches, he saw something bright in the corner of his eye.

“...?!”

He pruned it with his flame sword by reflex.

Light and fire collided, a thunderous roar scattered.

“Was that lightning just now?!”

He had expected to be attacked by something like that, but he didn't expect it to be that powerful!

One light after another flickered.

“KU—!”

The lightning attacks came at the speed of light and consequently exceeded sound of the cracking lash.

Even with his intensified kinetic vision from [Seele], the best he could do was react and deflect.

“Why can they see us, when we can't see them?!”

“Probably thanks to the Black Beast's nose, right? It can track our whereabouts by smell.”

Plus, it seemed that Kiruru was firing thunderbolts on the move, as the attacks didn't come from the same direction twice.

He was probably about to have his whole body pierced by tens of thousands of volts in the next instant and collapse.

“Just as I thought, isn't it? Completely relying on long-distance attacks. She intends to not let us get close.”

Sherry's gaze grew grim while she was safe behind Hayate's back.

“Does this look like the time to be calmly analyzing them?! What are we going to do?! If this keeps up, we gonna get sniped!”

“Her method's good, you know?”

“Huh?”

“Even if the Black Beast is a superior contract beast, keeping up mobility while aiming at the opponent and releasing lightning attacks creates a lag effect. On top of that, they bend the lightning to hit us and avoid the trees, so any return fire we send won't reach them in time.”

So were the lightning attacks just now not travelling at the speed of light?

Thanks to that, Hayate had a chance to react.

“Everything else is just a guess, but Kiruru seems to be moving together with the Black Beast.”

“She’s riding on the back of the dog?”

“Yeah. If they’re making separate actions, it doesn’t matter if Kiruru’s [Wand] is short-range or long-range, it will have greater affect with her contract beast if they remain close together”

Speaking of which, the attacks from earlier seemed to have been long distance thunder.

“I vaguely figured out that girl’s ‘disposition’.”

“...It’s fine if you gloat, but... WHAT AM I GONNA DO HERE?!”

Hayate screamed while still defending against the oncoming lightning attacks.

“Wait a second.”

Sherry commanded and started to chant a spell.

“O those who doth reside in the crowns of the giant tree, by thy eyes that foresee all creation, reveal to me the paths of my enemies——”

With the sound of freezing air, a globe out of ice formed in front of Sherry.

“——[Hræsvelgrei].”

When her chant ended, the completed ice mass floated lightly in the air and started to revolve slowly.

“What’s that?”

“[Hræsvelgrei]. Like its name suggests, it’s magic to detect the enemy.”

Apparently, in the sphere exactly 12 faces could be seen. Once the enemy’s presence—— temperature, respiration, static electricity, and so on—— was detected, the caster was informed about their whereabouts by a light.

“What’s with that? So there’s magic that can properly track down the enemy too? Then...”

“The problem is that [Hræsvelgrei]’s effective range has a ten meter radius.”

“...Only that much...”

No matter how he looked at it, the enemy was attacking from farther away. It was utterly useless.

“Well, if [Hræsvelgrei] was such a convenient a spell, then no one would be bad at tracking their opponents. So pray that Kiruru-san steps into the effective range by chance while you’re putting up with it.”

“PUTTING UP WITH IT ISN’T MY ROLE HERE, IS IT!”

Just telling me to is easy, damn it!

While repelling the lightning attacks with his flame sword, he moved randomly and simply prayed that [Hræsvelgrei] would detect Kiruru.

His eyes had gotten used to seeing a good deal of lightning attacks, but it felt like they were being cast from far away.

Although a good deal of the opponent's attacks came from the contract beast, Hayate was alone to...

Hm? Wait a sec.

At that moment, a genius idea came to Hayate's mind.



“Hee...”

Aria was sitting on a well-shaped rock on the edge of the outdoors battle area while Hayate, Sherry, and Kiruru carried out their fight.

The current situation between Hayate, Sherry, and Kiruru was reflected on the screen in front of her, which the Miming projected into the sky. The picture was more vivid than what [Clairvoyance] magic could do. And besides that, the angle of the [Clairvoyance] broadcast was fixated, whereas the Miming could move freely in the area and follow their movements.

This broadcast was possible because of a mechanism called 'Machina', that was arranged in the body of the Miming – her contract beast—— For instance, the Black Beast could shoot lightning and used who-knew-how-much of Kiruru's magical power. But Machina moved without magical power. So assuming Aria completely ran out of magical power, Miria would still be able to completely display its ability.

However, there was a downside too. For example, it was possible to increase the strength of the thunder attacks by increasing the amount of magical power the Black Beast received, but that wasn't the case for Machine Spirits. In exchange for not consuming magical power, its scale was fixed. That's the reason Machine Spirits were called special among contract beasts.

In a certain country, attention had been drawn to the mechanism that could always put out the same results, and human-like devices that imitated the construction of Machine Spirits were being developed, but...

Back to topic.

Thanks to the Miming's ability, even with Aria sitting in the corner of the zone like this, it was perfectly possible for her to observe the fight between the two teams.

“Hayate-kun is thinking up something interesting, huh?”

Aria expressed a pleased smile as she was watching Hayate and Sherry's movements on the main screen.

They were trying to refine the [Hræsvelgrei] magic while they were taking cover at the roots of a tree.

“In that case, what does Kiruru do...?”

In an instant, Aria revealed a solitary wry smile.

“You'll lose like that, you know...”



“...?”

Kiruru saw the ice mass in the sky and made a puzzled expression.

[Hræsvelgrei] remote control...? But something like this...

Kiruru knew that it was possible to send [Hræsvelgrei] flying into the distance.

However, [Hræsvelgrei] was magic that notified the user about the whereabouts of the enemy by using light. In that case, it was of course meaningless if the user couldn't see said light. Even if they sent [Hræsvelgrei] flying into the distance inside the artificial forest, the tracking light would be blocked by the trees.

Capturing Kiruru and the Black Beast in its effective range, [Hræsvelgrei] twinkled glaringly bright. However, the others were in no place to see the signal light.

Well, just to make sure...

Kiruru signalled the Black Beast to leave.

“Kuro. Come.”

“Gau—!”

In keen and nimble movements the [Hræsvelgrei] couldn't follow at all, they were nowhere to be seen in the blink of an eye.

——But that relief lasted only for an instant.

“...! [Hræsvelgrei] here too?!”

A new [Hræsvelgrei] had materialized ahead, twinkled, and started to signal Kiruru's whereabouts.

It looked like several [Hræsvelgrei] had been created, and as they spread out, several of them were about to discover their position. However, spells were limited by the magical power humans could put out at once. The number of [Hræsvelgrei] that can be deployed at the same time should be limited to around ten.

But first and foremost, if the light couldn't be seen by the caster, it held no...

“Eh?”

At that time, Kiruru discovered more and more [Hræsvelgrei] floating in the air. Two more ice masses opened in space and were being deployed, and the light of the [Hræsvelgrei] that had detected her was reflected by another [Hræsvelgrei] positioned fairly distant from the first. That light, on the other hand, was dispatched to another and another...

They were using [Hræsvelgrei] to look for other [Hræsvelgrei]...?!

It was a way to use [Hræsvelgrei] that she had never dreamed of.

——Hexenritter neglected magic to begin with. They used [Wand]s and contract beasts as the far superior weapons after all. The idea of scheming magic, was unnecessary, to be honest.

“...Ah!”

After Kiruru had wasted several seconds being dumbfounded, she finally realized that she should destroy the [Hræsvelgrei].

However, the conclusion came too late——

“DAA—! That’s the wrong direction!”

A boy’s voice she had heard before.

[Hræsvelgrei] signaled the location of the enemy by the frequency of its flickering light—— Going by what he had said, he had likely messed up the reading and where to go.

However, he had caught up with her.

SPLATTER!

As Kiruru watched, the leaves and branches above her incinerated instantly, then, through the clearing, a boy landed in front of her eyes.

It seemed like he had moved by jumping from branch to branch, as he had leaves and spider nests sticking to his face. Hayate then focused on Kiruru with the flame sword in his hand.

“Found you!”

“HIII!”

He probably didn't have any ill intent, but Kiruru couldn't help but let out a small scream.

She knew that it was nothing but training. And she knew that the [Divine Protection of Valhalla] operated inside the training ground facilities. However, her hands and feed stiffened and she unconsciously started to cling to her own contract beast. That inhibited the Black Beast.

“GRRR—!”

The Black Beast stood ready to defend its master and risk its life, but it was an impossible task with that kind of *luggage*.

Then, Hayate shortened the distance one step at a time, approaching the girl with a sword that emitted sparks——



“——And that's enough, right?”

“...?”

“The training's over, that's what I mean.”

Hayate drew back his sword just before it hit Kiruru and dispelled the tension.

Maybe because she understood the meaning of those words several seconds later, the strength suddenly left her arms and legs and the stiffness in her expression vanished.

I stopped just before doing it, did I scare her more than I intended to...?

“Are you alright?”

“Y-Yes...”

With a small nod, Kiruru tried to dismount from the Black Beast, but strangely, maybe because her strength had left her, her knees gave in when her feet touched the ground.

“Look ou—!”

Not missing a beat, Hayate slid to her to help.

“KYAA—!”

“OUCH—!”

He hit his head on a tree root...

However, Kiruru was safe, so it was worth it.

“Ehm...”

Her small body was fidgeting in Hayate’s arms.

She really was as cute as a small animal.

While he was thinking something along those lines...

“——I wonder, what are you doing – having a secret affair once your master isn’t around?”

Before he knew it, Sherry had appeared, folded her arms, and looked down on the two of them who were embracing each other.

“That’s not it! I just wanted to save her!”

“When we get back to the room, you will be punished.”

Hayate realized that his explanation was ignored and heaved a ‘can’t help it’ kind of sigh.

“Eehm, what’s going on here?”

Aria, the judge, appeared and tilted her head at the downhearted Hayate, who had won the mock battle in one way or another.

——After all of the battles were over, it was time for the next group to use the area, so they wrapped up practice for the day.

“Well then, shall we head to the ‘Berry-in Café’ once we wash off our sweat?”

“Ge...”

He had completely forgotten that there was still more work to do.

For the next week, since classes were finishing before noon, they went to the outdoor and mock battle area with Aria and Kiruru and practiced like crazy everyday. And once practice was over, they headed straight to work. It was a tight schedule, over and over again.

They dropped dead every night, but... thanks to the training, he gotten used to [Seele], and on occasion he had been able to serve up food in about three seconds – the fruits of his labor, in a way.

Sherry also succeeded in improving her [Hræsvelgrei] surveillance network, so as the midterms drew closer, their preparations were making gradual progress.

Swinging the flame sword around feels familiar in my hands... but something's still lacking...

That weird out-of-place feeling he had when he drew out [Seele] hadn't disappeared.

“Nn~~~”

On another day after training, Hayate strolled in the dorm's courtyard. Sherry was taking a shower in her room right now, so he had time to kill.

While he was at it, he thought about that ‘lacking’ feeling, but he still couldn't find an answer. This whole lacking matter was just a feeling, so even if he consulted someone about it, he wouldn't know how to explain it.

Maybe the answer to it was among his lost memories, but... in any case, as Hayate was right now, he wouldn't know.

“Hm?”

When he was about to return to Sherry’s room because it was almost time for work, he suddenly discovered the shade of a familiar face sitting in the shadow of the stairs, hiding themselves.

Kiruru?

They had only just parted ways after their training session.

What is she doing there...?

“Yo.”

“H-Hayate-san!”

When she raised her voice, Kiruru stood up flustered and stepped out of the shadows.

The area around her eyes seemed to be red...

“Something wrong?”

“Eh? E-Ehm...”

Kiruru started to get flustered, her hands were shaking.

She had tried to dodge him and was caught out.

“If you’re fine with it, you can consult me, okay? You see, as thanks for the training and stuff.”

“...”

Kiruru seemed to hesitate for a moment, but when she saw Hayate not budging an inch, she soon seemed to give up... Nervously, she opened her mouth.

“That’s... I couldn’t beat you during practice today either, so I’m feeling uneasy with the test in three days...”

“...Ah—”

Hayate had been really worried about that.

Indeed, it was hard to talk about it...

This week, Hayate and Sherry with Kiruru and Aria—— Or rather, Aria had stuck to being the referee, so they had basically done their combat training with Kiruru only. And Hayate and Sherry had won for the most part.

With the test in only three days, it’d be weirder not to worry about it.

“Ehm...”

Hayate could be said to be the cause of Kiruru’s worries in a way, so he didn’t know what to say to her.

While he was like that, she continued from where she had left off.

“I’m no good after all... When I fight, I get scared. My head knows that there’s the [Divine Protection of Valhalla] so I should be fine, but once things get serious, my legs turn to jelly and...”

While expressing a self-torturing smile, Kiruru stroke the head of her Black Beast.

“Kuun...”

Like that, her contract beast raised a worried wail.

Fighting is scary... huh?

It was related to the effect the [Divine Protection of Valhalla] had to ‘people without the intent to fight’.

If one faltered at the sight of injuries anyway, were they who were afraid of fighting really warriors?—— That doubt invited even more fear and weakened one’s will to fight. A downward spiral.

Nevertheless, he couldn’t neglect a worrying girl in front of him.

Scratching his cheek, Hayate searched for the right words.

“Well... that’s... somehow... I think it’d be fine even if you didn’t rush it.”

“...?”

“It’s only natural to be afraid of fights, right? Even I was afraid at the beginning.”

“Natural...? But I’m a hexenritter.”

“Hexenritter or not, aren’t you still a girl? Being afraid is only...”

Wait, women aren't the weaker sex in this world. Talking about my own value system of men and women would miss the point...

Hayate got flustered for a moment, but Kiruru had heard those words and stared in amazement.

She was probably shocked by his value system which was totally off from common sense in this world.

“Ehm... Then how did Hayate-san overcome his fear?”

Kiruru asked.

Hayate thought about it for a second...

“By finding a ‘reason to fight’, I guess...”

“Reason?”

“If you find it too, I’m sure your fears will disappear.”

At the time of the mock battle, Hayate, with his wobbly legs, had broken into a run to save Sherry.

“Hayate, what are you doing? Let’s get going already.”

At that time, Sherry came down the stairs and raised her voice – Hayate turned around.

It appeared that while he was in deep talk with Kiruru, she had finished taking her shower.

“My bad. Looks like it’s time to work.”

“Ah... is that so...”

Kiruru hung her head in plain disappointment.

When she hung her head like that, it left him with a complicated bad aftertaste: like she was some forsaken and incomplete figure.

Hayate secretly brought his face close to hers.

“You can come ask me for advice until the exam is over. Come to my room any time.”

“EEH—?! T-TO HAYATE-SAN’S ROOM?!”

“Eh?”

Surprised by the somewhat loud voice, Hayate distanced himself from Kiruru by reflex.”

“No, I did say my room, but it’s not mine, it’s actually Sherry’s...”

Hayate corrected her just to be sure, but Kiruru didn’t hear him as she had already left on a journey.

“Being called into a boy’s room... a young boy and girl, in a locked room... just the two of us...”

She muttered something in a very small voice.

“HAYATE! Hurry up already!”

“Y-Yeah! Well then, I’ll be going.”

Hayate was afraid to be late and consequently be scolded by Sherry, so he left Kiruru in a hurried manner and chased after Sherry, who had already gone ahead.

Behind him, Kiruru remained where she was, but she already fallen inside her usual dream world.

“Ah—! D-Don’t, not there... It’s my first time...”

“Kuun...”

The Black Beast, who had worried about his master for some time, gave an anxious cry for a vastly different reason this time.



Watching over them from the shadows of the dorm was a duo consisting of a human and small animal.

“Why am I even doing this...”

“Sha^[1]—...”

It was Victoria and Lindis. Though, one could say that Victoria was the main culprit here; the winged serpent was just following its master.

On that point, somehow things had turned into Victoria having been spying on Hayate and the others like that for one week.

If one asked why a girl of nobility would commit such an unbefitting deed...

¹ Please note that the sound of this is suspiciously close to “saa” which means “Dunno.../Beats me...”.

It's all that man's fault...!

Victoria resented without voicing it aloud.

The reason was that one week ago – in other words, on the day everyone had been divided into groups – Victoria had thought about trying to call out to Hayate and Sherry.

But before Victoria could do that, Aria and Kiruru had already talked to them, and in the end she couldn't voice her *deeply merciful proposal*, but... it had kept bothering her for some reason and she had ended up observing them secretly like this.

As a matter of fact, Victoria didn't know herself why she had gone this far.

Maybe because she didn't want her head to acknowledge that emotion which was *perhaps* beginning to sprout in her heart...?

“N-Never! I simply wanted to invite that man precisely because I want to return the favor from the mock battle during the test! And for that sake, my chivalrous heart thought that I should then prepare him neatly for that matter, I've done nothing to feel guilty about!”

Therefore her current deed should be just.

Shouldn't he rather praise her thoughtfulness, bow his head, and rely on her mercy?

I'm racking my brain like this for him! And yet when it comes to that man, he just won't understand me, goes with Sherry-san and... it's not just that, he's even getting along with Aria-san and Kiruru-san!

The more she thought about it, the angrier she got.

“If it’s like this, then I’ll *definitely* do it! I’ll teach that man a lesson in the test!”

“Shaa—...”

The girl had started a soliloquy all of a sudden and received a worried look from her contract beast.

Chapter 5: The Master/Servant Contract Between Him and Her

In preparation for the midterms on the next day, the students of Diaspell Royal Academy were heading off to the examination grounds inside the territory controlled by the Queen.

Due to the sheer distance they had to travel, they would be using carriages for transportation.

The exam was carried out by each class and the exam day for each of them had also been shifted by several days. This diminished the quarrels concerning the usage of the mock battle grounds that were used for self training and other things, and on top of that the roads would be completely blocked by carriages if all the students were to travel to the exam grounds at the same time, so this was to avoid those cases, or so he had heard.

They'd arrive on the exam grounds during the evening and after that it seemed that they would be recovering from the fatigue of the trip in the adjacent lodging accommodations that were prepared, until the day of the exam, which was tomorrow.

On the road...

“Oooh, a horse carriage, huh—!”

Hayate was honestly excited about the speed of the carriage that he would be getting on for the first time.

It had been like that when he had been on a date with Sherry in downtown Avenir, he himself enjoyed going to lands and places he didn't know quite a lot. Even though the exams were tomorrow, he was getting completely excited about it.

Oh man, I'm really glad to take a ride in a carriage.

The inside of the carriage that Hayate was boarding was quite spacious, so contract beasts like his fellow passengers Aria's Miming and Kiruru's Black Beast, could ride along in the carriage. Contract beasts that were hard to deal with or had some kind of other circumstance were moved in exclusive use carriages.

But then, there were also contract beasts among them who hated to enter a cramped vehicle for who knows how many hours, and instead travelled alongside the carriages themselves. From the window, they were able to gaze at their figures in the scenery that kept passing by.

“Speaking of which, what kind of place is the testing area for the midterms?”

“...”

Without answering Hayate's question, Sherry, sitting next to him, continued silently gazing at the landscape outside.

Is something wrong? Her expression's strangely weary...

When Hayate tilted his head in puzzlement, Aria, in the seat opposite of him, raised a seemingly awkward ‘Ah...’.

“I get it. Hayate-kun has amnesia after all, right?”

She bent forward, and whispered into his ear:

“The exam grounds that are under the direct control of the Queen, you see, had actually been part of the Scharlachrot Family’s property. When they seized their possessions, they also took the opportunity to confiscated their land, you know?”

“...!”

Noticing her verbal slip, she quickly covered her mouth.

Slowly, she took a sidelong glance at Sherry, but she seemed to take no notice, as her elbow was still resting on the window frame like before as she directed her gaze outside.

Whatever she was feeling about getting closer to the land she had once lived on... was impossible to tell from her blank facial expression.

As initially planned, the Rivaldi class arrived at the exam grounds as the sun was setting, so they immediately checked into the nearby lodging and had their rooms assigned.

Of course, Hayate was sharing a room with Sherry.

Therein they should rest up until the crucial exam tomorrow, which was drawing closer and closer, however...

“...Why are you pinning me down on the bed?”

“Why do you think I’m pinning you down on the bed?”

Sherry asked back while, fufufu, leaking a strange, lewd giggle.

Having changed completely from when they had still been on the carriage, she seemed to be really enjoying herself the moment they were alone again.

Just a moment ago, Sherry had been taking a bath. Hayate had also just finished his shower earlier. And so, as she had appeared out of the bath with nothing covering her body, he yelled at her, ‘Get into a bathrobe!’, and when he had turned his back on her—— she had suddenly thrown him on the bed and straddled herself over his back. They were in that kind of situation.

“...!”

He could said to be lucky that he was lying face-down.

Why? As mentioned before, Sherry had completed her bath. She smelt great. On top of that... She probably wasn’t wearing a bathrobe either.

A terrifically soft sensation touched his back.

“Errrr, what are you planning to do here?”

Hayate asked while retaining his sanity as much as possible.

When Sherry placed her hand near his shoulder blade, he bent his body with a groan and she whispered so close that the breath tickled his ears.

“Lately I’ve been thinking that I should give a hard-working manservant a massage, you see.”

“H-Hee—”

She whispered, as she assumed a position which was basically glued to his back, so that her butt, breath, and even her voluptuous breasts, were baring their fangs on his sanity. He broke out in a cold sweat from the mental strain and he couldn't help his voice, that was more than feigning to be calm, to grow flat either.

“Well now, stay still. When you're done counting the spots on the ceiling, I'll be done too.”

“...Then this won't end in this lifetime...”

He couldn't possibly count the spots while lying face-down.

“Nn...”

Sherry took a breath and put strength into her fingers that were applied against his hips.

One way or another, during the few hours on the carriage, his lower back had grown stiff as one might guess. And on top of that he had built up quite some fatigue from the daily training and work.

It was probably a service to easen up the stiffness and prepare him for tomorrow's midterms.

Well, that would've been fine, but...

“Nn... Nnnn...”

Every time Sherry did fine adjusting to her positioning to press the right acupuncture points, her butt pressed against his back, and each time she did, the chains holding his reasoning seemed to break off.



“Nnn... Pretty hard, aren’t you?”

“That’s, well, that happens when you do nothing but work and train pretty much all day, every day, right...”

“Really... hard. Are all boys like this, I wonder... Nnn...”

“...”

Do what you want, but please stop leaking those small moans every time you push the acupuncture points.

It makes my heart race.

“Hey...”

“Hm?”

“Have you still not made up your mind about me becoming your slave?”

“GU—!”

What kind of timing do you have to bring that topic up again now?!

Or didn’t she rather choose this timing deliberately to shake Hayate’s composure? If that was the case, then it did have an immediate effect. His heart was already thumping and racing like crazy.

Well, I don't really mind it... even I'm happy when a girl tells me she likes me face-to-face. Yeah, of course I'm happy. Being called a manservant by the one that likes me, having a collar attached to me, being restrained... well, those things distort the mood, but, well, I get the feeling that she wants her partner to be hers only. Liking somebody probably had many of such aspects.

However, to be told to do to her whatever he likes as his slave, and that as compensation, it worried him as expected.

“...”

“From your silence, it seems like you haven't reached a decision... *right?!*”

While emphasizing the end of her sentence, Sherry pushed much harder on his acupuncture points than before.

“GYAAAAAA!”

Hayate shrieked at the pain that had gushed forth all of a sudden.



“GYAAAAAA!”

Hayate's shriek was heard by Kiruru outside of the room.

To be more specific, just when she was standing in front of the door, about to knock.

“UGYA—! There’s th-GAAAAAA! WAI-GAAAAAA!”

The shrieks that could be heard from inside sounded like screams of torture.

Well, in reality, it was just Hayate’s acupuncture points being roughly massaged, but Kiruru, standing outside, had no way of knowing this.

“...!”

Kiruru didn’t have any special reason to visit Sherry’s room—— or more precisely, the room Hayate was in—— either.

But for some reason or another...

As she was waiting for tomorrow’s exam, her hands had started to shake again and... unfortunately not being able to find her childhood friend Aria, she had suddenly remembered the words that he had thrown at her several days ago, and now she was standing here.

“...”

Kiruru didn’t have many friends. You could say she had no friends at all, other than her childhood friend Aria.

She had been bad with words and weak to pressure since she was young, and a faint-hearted character to top it off.

And another unlucky thing—— even though she wanted to be seen as someone ordinary—— she possessed an extremely high amount of magical power, and she was endowed with good qualities for being a hexenritter.

If you were a genius of high birth, it was inevitable that you'd be burdened with high expectations—— which pained our faint-hearted girl.

However, she didn't have the courage to betray those expectations either.

Fighting was scary. But if she didn't maintain good results, she'd betray her parents. Every day during her student life at the academy she was in a dilemma between her own true feelings and the expectations of those around her, and she had always been filled with the desire to run away from it all.

That's why, how to put it, she had the habit to frequently fall into delusions like, 'I'm not here'.

Or, 'One day I'll suddenly be caught by a slave trader and be sold off to somewhere'.

Or, 'One day I'll suddenly lose my magical power, disappoint my parents, and be left alone in a corner of the house'.

Leaving the excessive negativity even in her delusions aside... the one thing that they seemed to share in common was that in all of them she was put in a position where she wasn't required to do anything and could be at ease.

Even if she was snatched away by someone, deep inside her she thought that it'd be okay to part with everything.

She simply wished to be at ease.

To someone like her... Hayate had said, 'It's only natural to be afraid of fighting'. Those were words that no-one else had said to her before that day.

Hearing those words at that time – before the exam, her heart had become light, as if it had burst open. It had put her at ease.

So she wanted to visit him again like this, she wanted to be put at ease again.

And yet... when she thought that he was suffering, why did her heart throb like this?

—*I... want to save him.*

Not him save me, but I him.

It was the first time that she, who had been protected from everything without fail by her childhood friend, felt like this.



The breakfast on the following morning was a light one, so that it would not have an impact on the exam. Fighting on an empty or full stomach could impair their judgement and battle prowess.

After the meal they were provided with a bit of free time.

How to spend the free time varied from student to student.

Some did light exercises. Some simulated in their head how to brawl in the battle royale. Others checked up on the physical condition of their contract beasts. It differed from person to person what they did, but one thing all of them probably had in common – they were nervous.

At any rate, it was their first exam since they had enrolled into Diaspell Royal Academy.

It'd be weirder to not be nervous... but...

“You somewhat seem the same as usual, huh?”

“That so? I’m nervous nonetheless.”

Sherry, sitting proper next to Hayate, was elegantly having a taste of some tea. Her hands weren’t shaking, her expression the same as always.

With that, when Hayate was about to say that it had to be a lie about her being nervous...

“...”

He stopped himself.

Sherry’s expression was hard to read by nature. Something like her emotions clearly coming to the surface, like when she was insulted by Victoria, or during the date, it wasn’t to that extent, was it?

On the other hand, it wasn't like she never showed her feelings.

She also had a strong determination to return her family, and exceedingly deep and warm kindness in reserve. Her façade may appear calm, but it was too rash to conclude that she wasn't nervous.

That's why Hayate decided to say something else.

"Well, as long as you do all that you can, I'll do the same. Let's both keep at it until we're through."

However, Sherry twisted the corner of her mouth in discontent.

"With 'keeping at it until we're through' you mean up to anywhere, right?"

"S-Sure..."

A girl who didn't know when to stop.

That much was a given when one was to speak of Sherry Scharlachrot.

... Which reminds me, will Kiruru be alright?

Hayate's thoughts suddenly shifted in another direction.

To the girl who had told him that she was scared of fighting.

In the end, she didn't come to him to receive any consultation related to the test.

Did she settle it by herself... it's hard to imagine that with her personality, but what about now?

Hayate tried to indirectly look around for Kiruru... and there she was.

She was together with Aria and they seemed to be talking about something.

“_____”

“..._____”

Unfortunately, he couldn't hear their conversation from where he was.

However, although Kiruru's expression seemed tense, it seemed to be the good kind of tense. Not nervousness from a fear of fighting, but more like she had steeled herself for the battle ahead.

Could it be that Aria had put her into a suitable condition while Hayate wasn't looking?

Well, if that's the case, then I'm glad.

For now, thanks to the concerns that I remembered having vanished, a load is taken off of my chest too.

Now all that was left to do was wait for the examination to begin.

When free time was over, they travelled another time. Though one might say that it wasn't a long distance travel as the day before, it was only a small distance from the lodging to the actual testing grounds.

“Well then, I’ll explain the midterm examination from here on out.”

Lela said while standing in front of the students who were lined up in a row.

“First of all, the battlefield is the testing ground in front of you that spreads out five kilometers into every direction. The border of the [Divine Protection of Valhalla] is marked by a one meter wide red line, so you can hardly miss it. This should go without saying, but going outside of the premises is a foul.”

A five kilometre wide battlefield into each direction... that's probably many times the size of the mock battle grounds, isn't it? While he was about to calculate it, he gave up as it was too bothersome. Anyway, the size was befitting, he could understand that much.

“The rules that decide the winner are basically the same as in the mock battle. If a hexenritter faints or gives up, they’re defeated. Attacks on already defeated participants are strictly prohibited. By the way, the results are the same, no matter which way you lose. Hang in there as long as possible.”

While implicitly saying that if they were going to give up they should fight until their last, Lela continued her explanation.

“Next, we’ll give each of you one of these.”

When Lela said that, exam inspector teachers like her handed over lapel badges inserted with materia to the lined up students.

“Next. For you too, I guess.”

“...Thanks.”

Hayate, too, received a lapel badge and fastened it to his uniform.

“That badge is charged with [Angelus] magic. From the signal that it sends out we can verify where inside the exam grounds you are, so don’t lose it. In an emergency, you can face the badge, call out, and thus converse with us.”

On that occasion, [Angelus] had a protection built in and didn’t let one get in contact with the other students. It couldn’t be used for anything but teacher/student contact.

“Besides the [Angelus] magic, the badge is also enchanted with magic to observe your [Parameters].”

With that magic, the exam inspectors could check up on the students’ emotional changes and their state of consciousness at all times during the battle. And so they’d know once one fainted, or namely whether they had lost or not in the battle royale. So the defeated ones would be promptly retrieved by the exam inspectors.

“What will happen if the badge, by any chance, is undone?”

“In that case, the signal itself will be lost. That’s why you must fasten it tightly. In case it’s lost, the person themselves has to search for it afterwards.”

Looking for a small badge in a testing area that spans five kilometres in every direction didn't sound very appealing. Still, the signal should roughly tell where the spot is before it got lost, but...

Plus, supervision by the teachers on location and communication via the badge were more than enough for the mid terms, there was no observation via [Clairvoyance] as during [Eighth Big Walpurgis Night] tournaments. If they attempted to surveil all of the five kilometre in every direction battlefield, on top of a large scale device, they'd have immense expenses.

“Rest assured. If there's someone who does things we can't see and uses underhanded tricks, feel free to tell me. I'll let that someone have nothing but liquid food for one year.”

...I think the spine muscles of everyone who had heard that serious tone of hers froze. And with that, if there was someone who planned to do some silly tricks, instead of redoubling their courage, they would be smart to acknowledge the rules.

When her brief explanation finished, Lela urged the red group, the first one to sit for the exam, to board the carriage. The students who had boarded the carriage were then all being blindfolded and brought to their respective, scattered about starting points.

“You'll be notified of the start by [Angelus]. Once the battle royale starts, you'll have to fight, fight, and fight until you're the last man standing. That's all.”

The place Hayate and Sherry were let out at seemed to be about midway up a hill.

According to Sherry, it was a starting spot on the southern edge of the testing grounds.

“Once it starts, should we go up on the hill or down?”

“Along the line is west... I wonder if downwards is fine. On top of the hill only about a few trees grow and we’ll be in plain sight for the most part. If the enemy comes, we’d be easy to spot.”

“Roger.”

She probably knew of what’s on top of the hill because this was the former territory of the Scharlachrot. If that was the case, then she probably had been here back in her childhood.

[Is everyone done with their preparations?]

Lela’s voice echoed from the materia. The badge was of course fastened to the uniform’s collar, but the voice could be heard without a problem.

Sherry replied with a ‘Yes’. She was being asked about their present condition and if some kind of trouble had arisen, and she responded that there was none. Others responded in the same fashion.

[Well then, from here on the midterm examination of red group starts.]

With that, nothing more could be heard from the badge.

“...Eh? Has it begun already?”

“Seems like it, doesn’t it.”

Sherry nodded towards that extremely quick starting declaration with an also somewhat dumbfounded expression.

“Well, it’s fine. Let’s get moving promptly.”

“Y-Yeah.”

First of all, Hayate and Sherry descended the hill as planned.

Measured from its base, the hill wasn’t all too high, so they could struggle down in an instant. When they had been looking from the top, it had seemed like some big rocks, but they were two or three meter big ones scattered all over the place. There were also crater at their feed, which left his mouth hanging wide open, each of them seemed to have a diameter of five to ten meters.

“Is this something that can happen naturally? Or was it made on purpose for the exam or practical training?”

He asked Sherry while peering into one of the craters.

“I wonder, do you remember the story about the Scharlachrot territory being attacked by demonic beasts in the old days?”

“Eh? Ah, yeah...”

“This is one of the battlegrounds from back then.”

“...!”

“As you might expect, not all of this was like this in the beginning, but... that one giant—— they call it Cyclops now, probably left who knows how many holes that relentlessly tell the story at first sight behind.”

Sherry explained it indifferently and didn’t change her expression at all.

The effect of the [Divine Protection of Valhalla] didn’t manifest in battles with demonic beasts.

There had surely been people who lost their lives here.

Or namely the fiefs of the former Scharlachrot territory...

“It’s not as bad as in the artificial forest, but the view’s tricky, isn’t it?”

Hayate tried to softly divert the topic as if he wasn’t used to that kind of thing.

“...That’s right, isn’t it. When we looked down from above, there wasn’t anyone, but... just to be sure, shall we start up the [Rorschach]?”

[Rorschach] was a technique to extend the range to search for the enemy by deploying multiple [Hræsvelgrei]. It was something they had worked out during the intensive training with Kiruru and the others, and they called it differently in order to distinguish it from a simple [Hræsvelgrei].

Sherry dispersed dozens of ice lumps that were produced by magic into the vicinity.

[Rorschach]’s effective tracking range had an approximate radius of about 100 metres.

Even though it was like this, it was probably useless if you had a contract beast with tracking abilities. However, for the time being they didn’t have to worry about suffering a surprise attack.

On the other hand, in relation to long distance attacks outside of [Rorschach]’s range, they used Hayate’s kinetic vision that had improved through [Seele] to rely on. They had earnestly trained it with an opponent for ten days who was among the top class concerning high velocity attacks, namely the Black Beast’s lightning attacks. The fruits of that labor were being tested.

“Hey, you too hurry and draw it out.”

“Yeah, yeah—— Creation!”

“Ah... Nn—!”

...She made an embarrassing sounds as usual when he drew out [Seele].

Hayate’s hands gripped the flame sword.

Immediately, power flowed into him from the grip and his physical abilities overall increased exceptionally.

“...”

“What is it? Feeling uneasy again?”

“Hmm, well...”

“It’s fine, please concentrate now.”

“You’re probably right...”

He refocused.

Once Sherry had applied [Himmelsschritt] magic to herself, the two of them started to move out.

While Sherry looked out for surprise attacks from hidden enemies via [Rorschach], Hayate was watchful towards the outer range of [Rorschach] while they were running about one kilometer over the land that was covered in rocks and holes, when—— [Rorschach] reacted to an enemy.

“100 metres, front to the right!”

“—!”

Receiving Sherry’s directions, Hayate immediately broke into a run.

As his leg strength had been heightened by [Seele], he could run 100 metres in less than five seconds. But there was a big rock obstacle in the way, so he put just a bit strength into his legs before it.

“OOOOOH—!”

And lept over the large rock with one jump which topped his own height.

He swung his flame sword in the air.

Under his eyes was a girl that lead a big salamander.

“WHA—?!”

The girl saw Hayate, who had suddenly appeared over her and raised her voice in surprise.

In her vicinity, the fragments of the [Hræsvelgrei] that she had destroyed immediately were falling down. Although she had destroyed the [Hræsvelgrei] for now, it looked like she hadn't known what to do next—— This opening in that situation had been too lethal.

“STRIKE—!”

With the force of the fall, Hayate sliced his opponent in one strike.

“AAAAAAAHH—!”

The girl screamed and fainted.

“...”

He checked whether the [Divine Protection of Valhalla] was working properly, just to be sure. When he stripped off the collar of her uniform, the salamander raised a growl but luckily didn't bite him, and he was able to confirm that she didn't have a single wound on her body.

“Phew. That's good.”

“What's good, I wonder?”

“HII!”

Before he knew it, he heard a cold voice from Sherry who had been standing behind him and his heart almost stopped.

“W-What’s with that?! You startled me there.”

“So? Peering into the cleavage of a girl that’s not me, what’s ‘good’ there, I’d like to hear.”

It seemed like he’d get killed depending on the answer.

“I-I’m not guilty of anything here at all! I simply wanted to make sure that the [Divine Protection of Valhalla] worked properly and...”

“Hee—, that so? So you had to have a look at her breasts to confirm that.”

“That’s not it!”

“Are you displeased with mine?”

“I said, that you’re mistaken!”

“Even though you just touched them moments ago...”

“That was to take out [Seele]!”

“I wonder if you don’t just want to touch my cleavage, but also want to try and properly massage them?”

“Huh?”

Hayate’s eyes were naturally sucked in by Sherry’s bountiful twin hills.

If he had to say whether he wanted to massage those or not... that's, well, he *is* a man... So, once he was about to unintentionally nod, he shook his head in a fluster.

“No, now’s not the time or place to talk about that kinda stuff, right?!”

“That’s right, isn’t it.”

Maybe because she just wanted to tease him, Sherry dropped the subject, faced the badge, and reported that one of the competitors had been brought down.

[Hoo, you lowlives scored the first kill? How unexpected.]

Basically, other teachers and students shouldn’t be able to hear [Angelus], but Hayate and Sherry were a pair, so maybe taking that into consideration, he could also hear Lela’s voice coming from the badge.

“Does that mean the other students still aren’t fighting?”

[That’s correct. It might be their first battle royale, but when careful guys gather, on the start everyone’s devoting themselves to waiting and it easily ends in a stalemate.]

In short, there were many people just lying in wait for the enemy to make their first move.

It was a bit of a troublesome development for Hayate and Sherry, who were inferior in tracking the enemy and only good at close combat.

“So, where will we go next?”

“Let’s see... let’s head north and try to get to the center.”

“So we’re cutting through the forest?”

From Hayate and Sherry’s viewpoint, there was a forest spreading out in front of them to the north.

“No. First, we’ll head north-west. Once we go that way for a bit, we’ll reach the edge of the forest and lots of grass will be in sight; let’s progress through there.”

“Yeah, got it.”

They both resumed walking.

Just as she said, the woodland on their right side was interrupted after they trekked for a short while, and instead a field appeared with grass that was taller than their knees.

Changing their running direction, they ran hard through the grass now.

Some time ago there were a lot of blind spots because of big rocks and pitfalls, but here they were able to look into a considerably vast distance.

“Where will we end up if we keep advancing like this?”

“A small canyon.”

“And that’s the center of the exam area?”

“It’s a bit off, but it’s almost the center.”

On the occasion, when the chivalric order of the Queen and the national forces carried out their practice, they divided the field into half with the canyon as a central line to distinguish between a northern and southern maneuvering ground.

Soon, when that canyon started to show up in front of them...

“—! Stop!”

Discovering the figure of a person suddenly emerging from inside the forest, Hayate instantly warned Sherry.

Both of them raised their guard, and carefully watched their opponent's moves—— but...

“Isn't that Aria and Kiruru?”

Their opponents that had appeared were people Hayate knew, so he lowered his sword.

“Yoo, Hayate-kun, Sherry-kun.”

Aria came waving her hand heartily.

Greeting them with such a carefree tone, Hayate felt more and more relieved.

“What business do you have here?”

Sherry tossed an extremely frank question.

“Kiruru's the one with business here. I'm just a simple guide, you know?”

“Kyururu.”

The Miming made a call in agreement with its master's words.

Probably using her contract beast's ability to find Hayate and Sherry, Kiruru had brought them with her.

But... for what?

Hayate and Sherry were waiting for an answer from Kiruru.

“I’m...”

Kiruru dismounted from the Black Beast's back, took one deep breath, and pointed at Sherry with an almost brave face she hadn't been able to make up until now.

“I'll wager Hayate-san, and challenge you to a duel!”

She declared.



That had been sleeping in the depths of the canyon.

It stood more than ten metres tall. Its limbs and body were huge, so much so that they nearly covered the canyon floor.

The giant didn't have a name.

Although it was true he had no name, the small humans had given him one.

Once, he had been called Giant Cyclops.



“Duel...?”

Hayate pondered over the words that had departed from Kiruru’s mouth.

“...Wait, A DUEL?!”

After several seconds of being a blockhead had passed, he finally understood the meaning, and so Hayate raised his voice in shock.

Nonetheless, Sherry kept her cool beside him.

“Betting Hayate on this, you want him too?”

“T-That’s right! And more than this, I can’t leave Hayate-san in the care of an awful person like you!”

“...But I don’t understand what you’re talking about.”

Then Sherry shifted her gaze to Aria.

When she sensed that Sherry wanted an explanation, she replied with:

“I was told by Kiruru that last night Sherry-kun tortured Hayate-kun in cruel ways. Even if you’re his master, and even if he’s your contract beast, she can’t let her own fiancée suffer like that—— And thus it has come to this.”

“...Torture?”

Hayate tilted his head, not recalling suffering such a thing.

It couldn’t possible be that the shrieks he had raised at the time of yesterday’s massage were the cause of a misunderstanding, that couldn’t be in his wildest dreams.

“...Well, it’s fine. We’re in a battle royale here after all, we were going to fight anyway, so shall we do it here and now?”

“Ooi! Are you really fine with just accepting it like that?!”

“It’s more shameful to run from a duel like that, you know?”

Sherry declared smoothly.

“And... I’ve got to punish thieving cats that try to get their hands on my manservant, right?”

“...!”

Even though there wasn’t any magic being used, the air got chilly for some reason and Hayate shuddered violently.

“Kiruru. In any way, it’d be better if you sto...”

He unintentionally got worried and advised her to surrender, but...

“No way! I’m going to protect Hayate-san!”

She turned a deaf ear.

Her expression was serious, but she also appeared to be intoxicated from the situation. Was she having delusions about something again...?

“Oi, Aria! You try and stop those two, too!”

“Nn~... Well, I don’t wanna hinder people’s romances, you know?”

And then she went and added more things:

“Up until now, Kiruru’s daydreaming had been nothing but a mere habit to escape from things, but it’s different this time. She’s not escaping, she came to me to fight. It wasn’t her usual ‘Save me’, it was a ‘I want you to help me out’. My own interest into Hayate-kun still hasn’t ceased, but... as her childhood friend, I can’t help but cooperate with her, right? Of course I can’t meddle with the duel.”

Aria took a step back, announcing her neutrality.

“~~~!”

If it had come to this point, it seemed there was no way but fighting. At least the girls hadn’t stopped in accordance with Hayate’s pleading.

“If I win, you’ll set Hayate-san free. What does Sherry-san want in case she wins?”

“If I had more time, I could’ve come up with something, but well, it’s no problem if we just say that you’ll owe me a favor. If you return it some day in some form, that’d be wonderful.”

“Understood.”

“The duel’s rules... well, you’ve challenged me in this kind of place, so would the mock battle rules be fine? Without the ‘off the premises’ rule.”

“I wouldn’t mind.”

“By the way, I did hear that your condition is to set Hayate free, but... as you see, in Hayate’s and my case, he’s the one who mainly fights. In other words, your opponent will be the one you want to set free, are you fine with that nonetheless, I wonder?”

“...Yes. But we’re using the mock battle rules, so bringing down no one but Sherry would fit the requirements, wouldn’t it?”

“Yeah. Goes without saying.”

The duel conditions had been settled.

Sherry undid her [Rorschach].

Kiruru got on the Black Beast’s back again, that she had dismounted from before. She walked back about ten metres from her opponent, in similar fashion to a mock battle.

Hayate also released [Seele] at once.

“Suu... haaa...”

He took a deep breath.

Partly because he had been dragged into a duel between those two, but mostly because they were in the middle of a battle royale now. Sooner or later, there would be a chance for them to fight against one another. Did she deliberately practice together with us just for this reason I wonder?

Aria had practiced together with them before too, and she had said it was so she could more easily observe this and that. Of course Hayate had thought so too.

Either way, since I've promised to protect Sherry's dream, I've got to stick with her. I can't go easy on this girl...

Hayate belatedly steeled his resolve too.

“Well then, I’ll give the starting signal. Is a cointoss fine?”

Aria took out a copper coin from her pocket and each of the three opposing people nodded respectively.

“——Here I go.”

She tossed the coin.

“”””——””””

One second felt like many.

Even so the coin was being guided by gravity and would certainly drop——

——*cling*

The three of them moved at the same time.

“Creation!”

Hayate drew [Seele] from Sherry’s cleavage, who endured by biting her lips and gasping. She then started to chant [Himmelsschritt].

In response, Kiruru took a big leap back together with the Black Beast, while ordering her contract beast to attack.

“Kuro!”

Lightning attacks. A beam which brought destruction with it, attacked Hayate and Sherry.

“Ku—!”

Hayate ripped that attack apart by a hair’s breadth.

Compared to their practice, the thunderbolt reached them very quickly. It was because they did not have to bend it around the various trees in the artificial forest.

If he had attempted to slice it with his usual timing, he would probably receive an unexpected shock.

“——[Himmelsschritt].”

At that moment, Sherry finished chanting.

Both of them came together, while keeping a reasonable distance from Kiruru.

They aimed at Sherry who was glued to Hayate's back, but all of it was cut down or intercepted by the up-welling fire. In the event of close combat, they had also practiced to move around while he ensured that she was in a place that was easy to protect.

The fire and lightning exchange lasted for a short while and gradually Hayate's attacks were nearly close enough to touch the Black Beast's nose.

“Uh—...! Kuro!”

Tacit understanding. Comprehending its master's intentions, the black animal changed its course and dashed into the woods.

Hayate and Sherry chased after them.

Compared to the artificial forest during the mock battles, the environment in a real forest was different after all. First of all, the ground was uneven. Then the trees weren't equally spaced. And there were many protruding branches and bushes.

As expected of its keenness and nimbleness, the Black Beast advanced into the forest while dodging.

The pursuing Hayate cleared away the hindering leaves and branches and proceeded ahead.

Naturally, lightning attacks came flying at them from a place they were unable to see.

However.

“DERYA—!”

They had thoroughly practiced a situation like this in their training and were used to it. So much so, that the lightning attacks in the open space earlier had been much harder to deal with.

While Hayate was defending against the opponent's attacks with the movements he was used to, Sherry mass produced [Hræsvelgrei] to complete [Rorschach].

Though, [Rorschach] was not fully automatic, and it was also magic that none but she could operate. To know the exact place Kiruru was at, they would first of all need to have a somewhat reliant prediction of a place where she seemed to be.

——Kiruru, who had practiced together with them, knew about [Rorschach]. Therefore, she didn't only crook the lightning attacks to hit Hayate and Sherry, but she had learned a technique to not let them know about her position by making a longer detour through more forest areas than needed.

By that technique alone, they had been unable to specify the origin of Kiruru's attacks, and they had also lost during practice.

However.

“——Found you.”

Sherry Scharlachrot's perception excelled the opponent's plan.

Her [Rorschach] was blinking to signify that it had discovered Kiruru's position.

Of course, that wasn't the end of it. The light of the [Rorschach], probably due to the [Hræsvelgrei] that had detected her being instantly destroyed, stopped blinking. Even so, when Sherry quickly manipulated the entire [Rorschach] from there on out, Kiruru's position was again notified about by light.

While he chased Kiruru following Sherry's directions, Hayate remembered how Sherry had told him she had seen through Kiruru's 'nature' back during training.

Kiruru's 'nature' —— it was 'cowardice'.

Well, if it was just that, then Hayate knew it too. He had often thought of her as something like a frail, small animal.

But Sherry's perception was far more precise than his.

If it was about Kiruru's nature, what to do when she moved, and how to move according to her anticipation of what Kiruru was doing —— She could read it all.

He had the impression that if she had been able to summon a normal contract beast, not Hayate, even if she would've become a normal hexenritter with that, as long as she had this perception, even if her abilities were already good, couldn't she have become an absolutely, exceeding hexenritter? Her reading was incredible to that degree.

And —— As he refocused his mind on the task at hand, Hayate and Sherry were leaving the woodlands.

In front of the canyon was Kiruru, on top of the Black Beast.

“...”

Cold sweat was running down the girl's face who had been cornered with her back towards the giant gap in the ground.

“It was probably a bit unfair to begin with, wasn't it? Because I know the layout of this land better than you... but you were the one who challenged me to a duel in this very place today, so you couldn't possibly have any complaints, could you?”

“...”

Kiruru gnawed her lips in frustration.

There was no place to run for her this time.

It was checkmate.

Although going in for the kill against this girl who had been cornered should be no problem... in the end he was a bit hesitant. If push came to shove and that was the only thing he could do then he would, but... to cut someone down without hesitation when no threat was present, Hayate was divided on what to do in that situation.

“Kiruru Demeter.”

At that time, Sherry called out to her opponent again.

With a terribly cold gaze and voice...

“Is that all?”

She said.

“Is this all you have? Is this as far as your desires take you?”

“...That’s not—”

As Kiruru sternly glared into her direction, Sherry sighed quietly.

“Aria-san wasted some unthinkable effort, didn’t she? Going out of her way to help out someone who ends up being a coward until the end like this. She’s pampering you too much as your childhood friend. She’s an idiot.”

“...Don’t make fun of Aria.”

“I’m not making fun of her. You did that yourself.”

“...”

“If you want to deny it no matter what——”

Sherry had been pointing directly at Kiruru for some time now so that she wouldn’t get done in suddenly, and continued,

“——then fight already.”

And told her that.

In regards to Kiruru, who had proposed the idea for a duel, she completely *pretended* to make her take revenge.

That Sherry... she may be playing the bad guy, but she... was urging Kiruru to fight.

Right.

While Kiruru had suggested the duel, she still hadn’t tried to fight with all she had.

Because she still wasn't holding the real proof of her intention to fight in her hand – her weapon.

“U-Uuh...”

Her hands trembled as she grabbed hold of the Black Beast's back.

This was the turning point in her decision.

Because it was Sherry, she didn't have any intentions of waiting there too long it seemed. If Kiruru continued to stay silent in that state, it seemed she wouldn't show any mercy in ending the duel right then and there.

“Kiruru.”

At that time, those words naturally left Hayate's mouth.

“Try to smile when you feel scared. If you do that naturally, courage will well up inside of you too.”

“_____”

Kiruru's looked puzzled.

After that... she slowly started to smile, looking embarrassed.

“If you're going to say that, would it be okay if you went easy on me?”

“Going easy on you would be completely unjust... and rude.”

Because he was having a little pep talk with their battle opponent, Sherry gave Hayate a look that seemed to ask ‘Who’s team are you on?’, then she let out a sigh that said ‘Yare, yare, can’t be helped’.

Kiruru descended from the Black Beast’s back.

“Kuun?”

A whimper showing its worry for its master.

As she gently stroked its head, Kiruru said:

“Sorry for always relying on you. I’m fine now—— because I was able to find a reason to fight too.”

Then Kiruru stopped caressing the Black Beast’s head, stood on her own two feet, and faced Hayate and Sherry.

“CAST—— [VOLCANIC GAUNTLET]!”

The next instant, her [Magic Vessel] appeared on both of her arms.

The gauntlets, which had a lightning-like ornaments, covered her arms up to the elbow and scattered static into the atmosphere.

“Here I come.”

“Come at me.”

At the same time Sherry responded, Kiruru's figure disappeared.

“—?!”

Relying on the cloud of dust that was whirling up as she moved, he perceived that she was taking a roundabout path to end up right behind Sherry almost instantly.

“Ku—!”

The lightning attack and the flame sword clashed.

Kiruru, regardless of them facing off at close range, vanished again in a flash of light.

A [Wand] that can turn her into lightning?!

Although the lightning attacks emitted from the Black Beast bent to a certain degree, they were nothing more than phenomenons that lacked a mind of their own. If they were blocked completely with the flame sword, they just vanished.

However, Kiruru had become one with the lightning, and it was vastly different. She defended against his attacks, dodged, feinted, or stopped and tried get behind him. Furthermore, she had hands and feet. She could kick and use her hands; four more ways to attack. It was way more difficult than merely being attacked by one beam.

To top it off, her constant attacks did not let up, not even for a moment.

Sherry also attacked the Black Beast with [Freezing] magic as it defended Kiruru, whilst being protected herself, but she couldn't hit the nimble contract beast at all.

In the blink of an eye, Hayate and Sherry were forced onto the back foot, defending.

Luckily, Kiruru and the Black Beast's teamwork was still lacking experience. She was using her [Wand] today for the first time. Her lack of practice was undeniable.

On the subject of her lack of experience, there was one more thing. The impression when she was wielding the [Wand]'s strength. Among her movements were many useless ones and it was somewhat linear. It was probably possible for her to shake off Hayate's kinetic vision, if she would stop earlier to strike back.

“Hayate! Do exactly as I say——”

Sherry briefly conveyed her plan after she had seen through their enemy's weak points.

Hayate decided on his own accord when to execute the plan she had provided him with and put it into effect.

“BLAZE!”

Hayate let a flame gush out of [Seele] and produced a circular barrier.

“Uh—?!”

Being encircled in a flame wall, Kiruru stopped in urgency. She wasn't so experienced in using the lightning speed that she could smoothly dodge the obstacle which had suddenly appeared in front of her eyes.

Hayate, who had stopped her movements successfully, as well as skillfully leaving the Black Beast outside of the barrier, sped up in one go and closed the distance.

“_____!”

As Kiruru turned around, her both eyes seized Hayate, who was holding his flame sword aloft.

From there, maybe because she concluded that it was impossible to dodge—— she pulled out her [Volcanic Gauntlet] out of instinct, and her fist hit him at the speed of lightning.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

“UOOOOOOOOOOOH!”

The moment of impact.

In the next moment, after Hayate had swung his flame sword down and Kiruru had followed through with her punch, they had ended up with their backs to each other.

“Gu...!”

Hayate, who had received a heavy blow to his left shoulder, fell onto his knee due to the extreme pain.

Thanks to the [Divine Protection of Valhalla] there was no wound, otherwise his whole arm from his shoulder would've been blown off, but it still hurt like the protection hadn't been there. It seemed that he wouldn't be able to move his left arm for a while.

While Hayate grimaced in pain, he forced a smile nonetheless and talked to Kiruru's back.

“Couldn't you have gone a bit easier on me?”

“Don't want to.”

An instant reply.

“Because Hayate-san wanted me to be serious.”

The moment Kiruru turned around to face Hayate, while she was standing languidly, both of her [Volcanic Gauntlets] had been smashed and dissolved into light particles.

Hayate had cut the gauntlets with his flame sword.

If the hexenritter and contract beast were in good health, they can draw the [Wand] out of the contract mark as many times as they wanted to, but...

“It's my loss, isn't it?”

Kiruru honestly acknowledged her loss.

Because she knew that if Hayate felt like it, he could cut her up too.

Then Sherry arrived.

“It’s our win, isn’t it?

“Yes...”

Kiruru hid her face.

Like that, Sherry added more words to her.

“But...”

“...?”

“If Kiruru-san had gotten used to handling her [Wand] sooner, and worked on her teamwork with her contract beast, it would have likely turned out the other way.”

Sherry closed her eyes and made a small apology.

“I apologize for insulting you and calling you a coward——”

“No, that’s...”

“——So forgive me.”

Why did Sherry declare her apology as an imperative?

Kiruru also seemed confused.

However, Sherry continued.

“If you do so, you won’t have a debt.”

“_____”

If they’d win the duel, she’d get ‘one favor’—— under that condition Sherry had accepted the duel.

She said that she wanted to use that debt here and now.

To take back her words that had been meant to sort of motivate the opponent...

But this stubborn girl would surely say ‘An insult is an insult’ and that she had to do that.

She's not the least bit flexible...

Hayate forced a smile again.

Of course, Kiruru forgave Sherry.

“——So what will Kiruru-san do now? Will you continue with the exam with no regard for the duel’s result?”

In response Sherry’s question, Kiruru shook her head.

“No, I’m somewhat exhausted already, I’ll retire together with Aria now and...”

As she said those words.

“I have found you at last.”

In reaction towards the raised voice, Hayate and the others turned around.

And there stood Victoria, leading on her lindworm, and three other hexenritter that had followed her... then Aria, who had a [Wand] sword pointed at her by the girls, stood up.



“——Wake up.”

The Cyclops sleeping at the bottom of the canyon stirred.

A voice echoed in the giant's mind.

“——Wake up. Your enemies are here, you lowlife.”

“...”

A green face.

The eyelid, that was closed slightly upward from the center... now, as if responding to something, began to open little by little.



Hayate and the others confronted the hexenritter lead by Victoria.

“What on Earth could your business be?”

“I really don’t need to spell it out do I?

Victoria’s business was obvious.

They were in the middle of a battle royale right now. There shouldn’t be any other reason besides fighting.

“Nonono! Wait, is that alright?! To team up together in something like a gang?!”

Hayate protested noisily.

“”It’s already been decided that it’s fine.””

Sherry and Victoria. Both unexpectedly answered in one voice, and Hayate was speechless. The people in question that had unfolded those words, seemed to both make a displeased face.

“...This is a battle royale. We have to beat everyone sooner or later, but it’s clever to join our hands on the way.”

Sherry continued to explain to the still perplexed Hayate.

“In fact, in last year’s [Brynhildr Cup], they tried to hinder the second championship of the consecutive champion Oltria by all of the other competitors teaming up against her. But they had the tables turned on them.”

“...”

Being told by everyone that this kind of thing was even acceptable in the contest that decided upon the continent's strongest, he couldn't complain.

“...Wait! Right! What are you going to do with Aria?! Isn't she a hostage!”

Not giving up, Hayate pointed at the captured Aria, but...

“Ah, it's fine if you ignore me. I was only threatened to guide them until here if I didn't want to experience something painful. After this I'll retire by myself like I wanted to, before I became a hostage—”

The person herself was talking quite indifferent about the matter.

“In that case, retire before you guide them!”

“No— But—”

Then Aria chuckled a bit.

“It's better than being ambushed by four people, right—”

“Like hell—...!”

Now he understood... one might see it that way. It was as if the scales fell from his eyes, for her to use her head so well while being threatened – Hayate admired Aria.

With her original composure having gone somewhere, Victoria, who had been lead on contrary to her belief, was in dismay.

“...H-Hmph! Of course I knew about that!”

And so she glossed over it with an attitude that could be nothing other than a bluff.

“And that’s why I only wanted to educate this plebeian of the horrors of a battle royale and by no means show cowardly behavior!”

“That’s why you thought a surprise attack was an elegant tactic?”

“You be quiet!”

“WAA—! WAI—! SENSEI, SENSEI! RETIRE! I RETIRE!”

Aria, who was seemingly pierced, panicked—— though it somewhat looked like acting—— and declared her retirement to Lela.

Attacks against a defeated hexenritter were banned, so the girls let out an annoyed ‘Ku—!’ and released Aria.

“Oh no— So scary—”

After she had been released, she nonchalantly walked over to Kiruru and the others.

But she had already retired, so they couldn’t expect any assistance from her, but...

“...”

Thanks to Aria's cleverness, they couldn't do a surprise attack, but the number of hexenritter facing off was still two against four. Furthermore, they contested against Victoria, who probably hadn't fought once, whereas Hayate and the others had just ended a duel in which they had given their all. The difference in exhaustion was obvious.

“...At any rate, you've collected a surprising number of followers again, haven't you?”

Sherry grieved, more in amazement than with sarcasm.

“Wh-What? You couldn't possibly have a complaint? Just as I said myself, it is acceptable to ally with someone temporarily, you know!”

“That's not it. This is a battle royale. Even though we must fight until only one remains, everyone has prepared companions. Won't they fight each other at some point, I thought.”

“Have no worries. This alliance will only last until you and that plebeian are brought down. After that we agreed to have a showdown.”

“Such a scrupulous decision again. I wonder, how long ago did you plan this? You really are vindictive.”

“ARE YOU MAKING FUN OF ME?!”

Shouting in an angry voice, Victoria put up her [Tailworm].

“Now, at best you can show futile resis——”

——GUROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

Victoria's voice was cut off by a roar that came from the ground.

Next, the earth tremored.

“W-What's going on?!”

After being interrupted by that engulfing roar, Victoria looked around restlessly.

Then, suddenly—

“GUUOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

It came literally from the bottom of the earth—— clambered up the canyon walls, and appeared over the edge.

The first thing they saw were two gigantic hands, big enough to easily crush a human.

Next, it looked like it only had one eye in the center of its head. A big one. And supporting all this, two legs that looked like they could flatten a person in an instant.

Its skin was all green.

Its only clothing was a small, dirty loincloth.

It unleashed a wailing war cry.

“GUUUUUOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

A one-eyed giant. A one-eyed ogre.

A demonic beast that once attacked the Scharlachrot territory—— A Cyclops was before their eyes.

“What... is....!”

The pressure from this presence that they hadn’t felt before made their skin crawl.

“That couldn’t possibly be a Cyclops?! Why would it——”

Aria’s voice was erased by the roaring sounds of the giant’s feet moving.

ZUSHIN—!

It made the earth tremble by only walking.

The girls’ legs were paralyzed by the quaking ground.

“Uh... WAAAAAAAH!”

One of Victoria’s distracted companions struck the tip of her spear into the ground.

In an instant, stone pillars emerged from the ground one-by-one, raising up a cloud of dust, and rushed towards the Cyclops in a straight line.

It was probably a [Wand] that could manipulate the earth. He thought that it was an extremely powerful attack, but——

“GURUAAA!!”

The giant crushed all of the stone pillars instantly with a single kick.

It picked up the crushed stone pillars and threw them like balls, pelting the girls that were struggling to stand upright.

“””KYAAAAAAA!”””

The screams of several people overlapped. There was also one who received a blow to the head by the ogre and fainted.

Hayate protected the three people that were near himself by clearing the fragments of the stone pillar away with his flame sword.

[OI! What's happening over there?!]

From all badges Lela's voice could be heard in an unusual tone.

Aria immediately shouted into her badge.

“It's the Cyclops! It seems it was sleeping at the bottom of the canyon and has suddenly woken up for some reason! We need assistance from the chivalric order as soon as possible!”

[Cyclops?! How many?!]

“One!”

Aria replied.

[If that's the case, survive until I arrive! Five minutes!]

Towards the end only noise was left and Lela stopped [Angelus].

The former country knight teacher would probably come running to them in five minutes as stated.

However, if that thing felt like it, it could turn them into mincemeat in one second. Was five minutes too long—?!

Shit—! Hayate cursed. It wasn't really directed at anyone. Though if he had to choose, it was directed at that giant in front of his eyes.

“You guys! Get out of here quick! I'll be the decoy!”

Hexenritter and contract beasts' physical abilities weren't ordinary, but the speed of a giant whose height easily exceeded a ten metres would no doubt be faster. Someone had to confine it.

Just about everything was only a momentary judgement, but Hayate had reflexively made the decision to protect them all; Victoria and the others included.

Victoria's companions, who had already been intimidated, carried their fainted friend on their shoulders and started to run.

While giving them a sidelong glance, Hayate regripped his flame sword in just his right hand. He had no more strength left in his left. He was at a huge disadvantage, but he encouraged himself, aimed at the Cyclops, and broke into a run.

“_____”

The giant eye turned into his direction.

“GUUOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

The giant was thrown into a rage as if it had found his bitter enemy and raised its strong arm over its head.

There was no time to argue, as the Cyclops swung its giant fist, which was like a boulder, downward, aiming at Hayate.

It wasn't possible for him to stop the blow with a sword that he only operated with his right arm.

GOPAN—!

The earth collapsed with a sound that he almost couldn't believe.

The crater that I saw in the wasteland at the exam ground, was it really the doing of one of those guys, I wonder?!

A shiver ran down Hayate's back.

The [Divine Protection of Valhalla] wouldn't work with a demonic beast as his opponent. If he, by any chance, received a blow from that thing——

The Cyclops didn't miss its chance, as Hayate's judgement was clouded by fear.

“Ah...”

When he came to his senses, above him he could see the the bottom of the giant foot approaching.

His body's huge and fast?!

I'm dead—— He thought.

However, just before he had gotten crushed underfoot for sure, Hayate was grabbed by someone and pulled out of danger.

“Kiruru?!”

“Are you alright, Hayate-san?!”

The girl that was asking him had [Volcanic Gauntlets] equipped on both arms. Thanks to the speed boost the [Wand] brought about, she had saved Hayate by a hair's breadth.

However, that wasn't the problem.

He had told everyone to run. Why was Kiruru still here?

To make matters worse, it wasn't just her.

“Just what do you think you are doing, trying to kill yourself without my permission, Hayate?”

Sherry said in her usual tone with her never-changing wicked tongue.

“You alright, Kiruru?”

Aria was also worried about her childhood friend again and helped her stand up.

“Gu?”

Speaking about the Cyclops, it raised its crushing foot and tilted its head when it didn't see Hayate's smushed body underneath. It checked the sole. It appeared that Kiruru, who had saved him at the speed of light, couldn't be perceived by him with just one eye.

They were alright for a short while now, it seemed, but who knew when it'd become aware of them again.

“WHY DIDN’T YOU GUYS RUN?!”

Hayate shouted by reflex.

“Is there a master who’d abandon their own manservant?”

“YOU...?!”

When he was about to say, ‘DAMN IDIOT’, to her...

“GUUOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

The Cyclops noticed them again.

“Tzk—!”

Hayate readied his flame sword in just his right hand again.

At that time, a big air cutting sound was made and a long whip hit the giant hard in the face.

With its eye glaring, the giant turned to the girl standing at the other end of the whip—— Victoria.

That girl didn’t run either?!

He had thought that she had fled with her unconscious companion long ago.

Why was she still here?——

“I am a noble, you know! Things like being seized by fear in front of an opponent and fleeing are impossible for me!”

Victoria shouted in a resonant voice as if encouraging herself.

She barraged the Cyclops with the seemingly infinite range of her [Tailworm].

“Guuuuu...”

The Cyclops made an angered face.

It was an anguished expression from the accumulating damage—— No, it wasn’t, it was more like the hateful expression one made at an irritating fly.

The giant raised its fists overhead to try and clear away that fly.

“That’s ba—!”

Hayate hurriedly broke into a run. While running, he pointed the flame sword towards the Cyclops’ face and fired.

“Gunu...!”

The giant didn’t even flinch as the heat passed in front of its eye.

But in the mere moment it had faltered, it swing its big-tree-like arm sideways.

“This... damn...!”

Hayate kicked the ground with all he had and jumped.

He made sure to hug Victoria’s body to save her the same way Kiruru had saved him not long ago and jumped again—— with the giants arm immediately swinging below his toes.

“Eh? Wha...!”

Victoria still didn't seem to have comprehended her current situation. Perhaps because she had tunnel-vision as she was concentrating on attacking, and hadn't seen the giant's movements. However, she witnessed the giant's swinging fist flattening the earth and finally understood that her own attack hadn't had any effect.

“Why did you save me...?”

“I don't know! Out of reflex, I guess!”

Hayate replied while running and holding Victoria in his arms, he then prepared for the next attack and glared at the giant.

“...!”

As he had her in a princess carry, Victoria's face was close to Hayate's when she looked at his serious expression, causing her face to uncontrollably turn rose-colored.

“H-How long do you intend to carry me! I'm fine already!”

“Is that so? Can you stand?”

“Of course I can!”

At last she was starting to struggle in his arms, so Hayate reluctantly let Victoria down.

When she stood with her two long legs on the ground, she started to wield [Tailworm] again.

“Lindis! Aim at its legs!”

“Shaaa!”

The winged serpent coiled around the giant’s ankles with low-altitude flying and repeatedly sunk its fangs into it.

A strategy to pull it down from its legs?!"—— Hayate understood her intentions and slashed at the other leg with his flame sword.

“Hayate-san!”

Plus, Kiruru and the Black Beast also came to assist.

They showered the giant with their lightning fast fists and thunderbolt attacks.

“Hayate-kun!”

Hayate dodged the attacks and temporarily separated himself from the giant, Aria’s voice reached his ears.

“Miria has analyzed the Cyclops’ weakness! Aim at the eye!”

“Understood!”

However, the one eye the giant had was ten meters above the ground. Although he was strengthened by [Seele], Hayate didn’t have the power to jump to those heights. It wasn’t impossible to hit it with a long distance flame attack, but...

“I’ll make you fly.”

Sherry had popped up beside Hayate and started applying [Himmelsschritt] magic on him.

“Only the person that applies [Himmelsschritt] can control it. You can either fly in a straight line, or with a bit of a parabola, which will it be?”

In other words, Sherry would make Hayate’s body fly, but only she could control it.

“The shortest route please.”

“Understood.”

To decide it with this one blow, Hayate grabbed the handle of his sword with both of his hands tightly. He ignored the pain in his left shoulder.

“——Go!”

“—!”

On Sherry’s mark, Hayate’s body was shot like a bullet.

Aim at that giant’s eye!

“UOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

Controlling his posture in midair, Hayate raised a roar.

The angle and timing were perfect!

While drawing an arc with the sparks that were rampant from the tip of the sword, Hayate believed he was halfway to success.

Immediately following—— the Cyclops bared its fangs.

“GUUOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

Without the time to even wonder what happened...

A tornado, that sprung forth from the giant's center, swallowed Hayate and the others.



Since the time Lela had informed them that they had to 'hold out for five minutes', Sherry had continued to count the seconds. She had decided to start to use her head to the fullest while she wasn't of use in the battle itself.

At the point Aria had informed Hayate about the opponent's weak point, about 150 seconds had passed.

Two minutes left—— It would be a difficult situation to hold out until Lela's arrival.

That's why Sherry had changed tactics to kill their enemy. She believed that if it was Hayate's [Seele], nothing would be impossible.

“——Go!”

And.

“GUUOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

Immediately after Hayate had taken flight using [Himmelsschritt]— Together with the Cyclops’ war cry, a tornado sprung forth from the earth with such power that the ground was ripped up and flung about.

A demonic beast had magic that people couldn’t compare to— It utilised Grand magic.

I didn’t mean to forget it... but...

Sherry, who had been whirled up because of the violent wind attack and dropped onto the ground, ignored the dull pain that was tormenting her whole body, and continued to think.

“Uh...”

When she moved her head left and right, she could confirm the fallen figures of Aria, Kiruru, Victoria, their contract beasts... and Hayate. All were gravely injured, but luckily no one had died.

The Cyclops raised a roar to declare its victory.

While ignoring that loud noise, Sherry asked herself further.

What did I miss?

Was my judgement off?

If she had been mistaken, then for what reason—

I think something... came to mind.

——Memories from her childhood resurrected in her head.

The calamity when the Scharlachrot territory had come under attack.

The disappearance of her mother, who she had loved dearly.

The life after it, which was filled with bitterness.

Of course, at the time when a herd of one-eyed ogres had attacked the Scharlachrot territory, Sherry had still been little, so she hadn't left for the battlefield.

However, when she went through the documents, there was one striking thing.

Because she had reread the documents way too often, even though she had never actually been on this spot, she had seen the nightmare of giants running over villages many, many times over...

She couldn't deny the possibility of her hatred growing stronger and stronger and hence clouding her judgement.

“Kuu—...!”

By merely moving a single finger, pain shot through her.

Sherry bit her lips so much that blood came out of them, and she forced herself to stand up.

——A little more than one minute until Lela would arrive.

There was still one more thing she could do.



“Gu... ah...”

Hayate, who had received the full brunt of the Cyclops' Grand magic from close range, had been ravaged by the wind and was now lying on the ground like a rag.

At least the flame sword was still in his right hand, he tried to put his strength into it and stand up, but——

“GU! AAAAAAAAHH!”

——Hayate's right arm was covered in so much blood that it was dyed completely red.

“...?!”

And he saw that his contract was destructed, which added to his despair.

Maybe as a consequence that the contract mark had been destructed, the flame sword was nowhere to be found. Not feeling the power provided by [Seele], his whole body was heavy as if he had submerged in a swamp.

Again, the Cyclops roared.

How much longer until Lela would arrive? He didn't know. But even if it was a matter of ten seconds, it was obvious that they'd be annihilated before that.

Hayate saw someone coming to him.

“Sherry—”

“Worn-out, right?”

Despite being covered in wounds herself, she said that in her usual tone.

“Ku—...!”

Hayate forcibly raised his body and tried but failed to stand up.

He fell to his knees and cold sweat run down his face like a waterfall... she gently put his face into her hands.

“Hayate.”

She called his name—— Sherry released her hands from Hayate’s face and with a smooth motion released his collar from his neck.

“With this, you’re not my manservant anymore.”

She said, as if she wanted to break the bond between them.

“Eh...?”

“Did you not hear me? I said there’s no need to fight for me anymore.”

Sherry threw away the collar that was the proof of him being her manservant.

As if she was abandoning Hayate himself.

“Ah...”

Hayate moaned.

At that, she turned her back on him.

“Schwartz-sensei will arrive in one more minute. That is why you’ll cowardly run as far away from here as possible.”

She threw in some more abusive words to stab him in the chest after she turned her back.

...*Sherry*—

But Hayate realized.

That the girl in front of his eyes was filled with concern.

Forsaken by those cruel words—— she had tried to make it easy for him to abandon her.

She had turned her back—— to stand against the giant now and serve as the decoy herself.

The time of the mock battle resurfaced in his mind, when she had declared to give up, without hesitation, to save Hayate.

“...”

Hayate understood.

The girl in front of his eyes, in this kind of scene—— for this moment, she had the courage to fight in order to save everyone here except herself; it was something only an outrageously kind and noble person would do.

He remembered the time from when they had first met until now.

“...!”

Hayate wasn't her manservant anymore.

She had already said that it'd be fine not to fight for her sake.

If that was the case... he, who had lost the strength to fight... the reason to fight was her...!

——The destructed contract mark on his right hand pulsated powerfully.

“SHERRY—!”

Once more, like at the time of the mock battle, Hayate broke into a run to save the lonesome girl.



The giant, who had raised a victorious cry, suddenly noticed the girl who was approaching it.

“So, come at me!”

The girl crossed her arms and announced magnificently.

“GUUUU!”

It couldn't understand human language at all, but it was clear that it was extremely displeased by the attitude of the girl that was staring at it so arrogantly.

If seen from the large creatures point of view, she was just too small, and small creatures—— it raised its giant fist overhead.

To smash her body with one blow.

“SHERRY——!”

But for that girl, one boy came running.

She was surprised and turned around, the boy’s right hand extended towards her——

——The merciless fist of the Cyclops swung down at the two.

“GUOOOOO!”

Taking the size of the giant’s fist into account, having to kill one or two didn’t make a difference. The Cyclops was sure that he’d kill them both and bellowed another war cry.

“OOOO——gu?”

Something was weird.

What was it?

The fist had certainly swung down—— the feeling from there on was different from usual.

When it raised its fist to check whether there were two smashed bodies—— suddenly the Cyclops' arm was engulfed in a roaring inferno and its arm was burnt up to the elbow in the blink of an eye.



A flame vortex had suddenly broken out and carbonized the giant's arm in an instant.

From therein a man and a woman, together with a red, hot light, appeared.

“Hayate...”

The girl, that was embraced in the boy's arm, called her partner's name in blank amazement.

He had hugged her back with one arm and the other arm had changed its form from earlier—— his sword shined with a divine blazing light as he held it up.

“I finally understood... the true identity of what was ‘lacking’.”

Hayate muttered.

The moment he had reached out to Sherry with his right hand on which the sword crest had reappeared, he was able to receive a large quantity of information like the time when he had first drawn [Seele] out.

...If one thought about it, Hayate kept calling this flame sword [Seele], but he didn't know its specific name.

Moments ago, it had flown into him as if it insisted on it, the name of his [Seele] – and poetry that extolled it.

That is the sword that kills kings——

That is the sword that kills gods——

And——

“——That is the sword that perishes worlds. Embererathem Sword [Lævateinn]... That's its name.”

“...You used it without knowing its true name? I'm amazed.”

Sherry muttered in genuine astonishment.

After that, her eyes displayed anger.

“Why did you come to save me? Despite not being my manservant anymore.”

Towards such selfish behavior, Hayate made a bitter smile.

When I was the one who told you to run earlier, you didn't run either...

That's why he returned the same words to his partner than she used some time ago.

“There's no master who would abandon their slave.”

“...!”

Sherry's eyes grew big as if dumbfounded.

Both of them locked eyes... but the giant, not being able to read the mood, cut in with a roar while he fell into another rage.

“GUUOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

The Cyclops raised its leg to crush both of them underfoot in order to avenge its burned arm.

“...It's just a giant...”

Perhaps it was because of the power that had just flowed into him from [Lævateinn], Hayate muttered with a voice that showed disgust like he never had before and casually wielded his sword.

Erupting from the tip of the flame sword as it traced through the air, in the blink of the eye raging flames grew and attacked the leg of the giant that was about to swoop down on them.

“GUGYAAAAOOOO!”

The giant's leg was burnt off from the knee as if it had been completely eaten by the huge attack.

With a crash, the one-eyed ogre fell to the ground clumsily.

Without even giving it a glance, Hayate continued staring at Sherry.

“You’re my slave. I’m your manservant. I’m your master, so I’ve got the right to make everything of you mine. You’re my master, so you’ve got the right to use me to grant your every wish.”

He told her the same words that he had been told himself that day.

With that, he declared his approval of the master/servant contract that has been suggested before.

However, seemingly displeased, Sherry said:

“I’m using you to fulfill my dreams. If that’s the case, then for what will you use my ‘all you desire’?”

She asked.

“_____”

The answer to that question was obvious.

As for the truth, it was an answer that would’ve been alright even if he had said it a long time ago already. Now he had been driven into a corner, he reconfirmed her kindness and nobleness, and with that he was able to reveal the answer...

Even if I’m being asked that bluntly, there’s nothing I can do, huh...

What should I say to make up for all the time I’ve held off giving my answer, I wonder?

The contents of my reply was obvious. However Sherry is demanding me to use my own words, my own voice, to convey my feeling across to her. With that said, I can't just give a simple reply to make up for everything. That being the case – the words she used to confess her love at the time, I replied should reply like this too:

“There can only be one reason a man wants a woman’s everything, right?”

“...That so.”

Hearing Hayate’s reply, Sherry gave a short answer—— and smiled like an angel.

[Lævateinn]’s brightness intensified to bless the fact that they perfectly understood each other’s feelings.

To begin with, he now understood why [Seele]’s real name could flow into him—— or why he couldn’t know its real name until now—— he had to get over his hesitation.

[Lævateinn]’s strength kept increasing as much as Hayate and Sherry understood each other’s feelings. The perfect sword to wield for her sake.

And now, for her sake, the target that he should wield its edge for was——

“GUUUUUUUU...!”

The Cyclops tried to muster its remaining strength and channeled magical power as before in its remaining left hand.

“Let go for now.”

Hayate pulled Sherry behind his back.

“GUOOOOOOOOOOO!”

The Grand magic of the wind, that had caused the tornado earlier, was thrown at Hayate.

“BLAZE!”

ROAR—!

Responding to the yell, [Lævateinn] produced a flame pillar.

The rising air current caused by the flames, pushed the Grand magic of the Cyclops into the atmosphere and scattered it.

For the first time, fear floated in the giant’s eye.

It clawed at the earth with its remaining hand, trying to retreat.

There wasn’t a reason to make an effort to run away.

“Your life isn’t even worth even a drop of the tears that have been spilled, but——”

He kicked the ground.

Flames overflowed from [Lævateinn]’s edge.

“——at least disappear from the earth without leaving even a speck of ash!”

The surviving demonic beast, that had overrun the Scharlachrot territory in the past, was being incinerated by the flames that spread from the wound which had sliced it in half with a single strike, and disappeared with not one speck of ash remaining in this world.



Epilogue: Promise in the Dead of the Night

Even though they had experienced tremendous troubles, the midterms had ended safely, and at night they had returned to the dorms of the Diaspell Royal Academy——

“Here.”

——Sherry was presenting the collar that had been put away into her desk since she had bought it at the time of the date.

Lined up next to it was Hayate’s, which had been unfastened. As one might expect from the highest class dragon scales, even after they had struggled through that fierce battle, it didn’t have one scratch. Of course, when they had come back it had been dirty, but it had already been washed off.

“...Is that really necessary?”

Hayate inquired Sherry again.

They had become each other’s property; one as the master of a manservant, and the other as the master of a slave. He was fine with exchanging such contracts themselves, but putting a collar on that pretty neck made him hesitate after all. Isn’t the verbal contract enough?—— He thought.

“I’m making you fight for my own goals. It will almost certainly lead to your death... even if you’re lending your own strength to me of your own will, that fact won’t change—— this is a reminder of it. If I don’t leave something that can be seen at all times, I’ll probably behave like a spoiled child.”

“...I see.”

If that was the case, then he had nothing else to add.

Sherry was the first to put the collar on his neck.

Next, he fastened hers while taking as much care as he possibly could.

“...There was something my late grandmother always said.”

She said while gently caressing the collar as if she was touching something precious.

“Some day, when I’d be old enough to love, she wanted me to look for someone who’ll love me as much as I love him. If that person was mightier than myself, then she wanted me to climb up to him. If I was ahead of such people, then she wanted me to look for someone, who’d come chasing after me.”

Hearing that story, Hayate suddenly understood.

The reason Sherry said that she would become a slave.

Maybe because she wanted to reward him for making him fight as her slave, or because she simply wanted to give him her all—— of course, those two reasons were also possible—— but most likely the reason why she wanted it to be like this was due to her grandmother’s teachings.

——She wanted her partner to be her equal.

Hayate, who fought to protect Sherry’s dream, would always swing his sword only for her goals.

He didn't swing his sword for his own good—— in other words, a manservant that worked for her goals. At least that was what she was thinking.

Probably for that reason, she desired to become his slave.

Hayate was a manservant with Sherry as his master.

Sherry was a slave with Hayate as her master.

It was for the sake of having an equal—— even if a bit warped—— relationship.

Yeah, completely inflexible... Hayate smiled wryly in his heart.

“”...””

Suddenly they grew silent.

Through the window, the moonlight shone between him and her—— It felt as if nothing, absolutely nothing besides them existed.

They gazed at each other intensely.

Suddenly—— Sherry told him as if she was reciting a poem:

“All of me is yours.”

“All of you is mine.”

Hayate replied.

This time he said:

“All of me is yours.”

“All of you is mine.”

Sherry replied the same.

Before they realized it... both of their heads had drawn closer, and their lips met.

The reward that was given to the manservant who had given his best for his master was a kiss, and the pledge that was bestowed on the beloved slave by his master was also, a kiss.

“With this, you’re my manservant.”

“With this, you’re my slave.”